



## Galatians - Chapter Three

### Summary of Chapter Three

The theme of justification by faith in Christ alone continues as Paul argues the case of the Gospel he proclaimed to the Galatians when compared to the requirements of the law that the false teachers are insisting upon.

Paul shows that the promise of a single family of God's people was given to Abraham long before the law was in place and that circumcision was a sign that God's covenant was sure, not a requirement to be a member of it.

The law was given to provide guidance for the people of God, showing them just how far from righteousness they really were, during the intervening time between the promise being given to Abraham and the fulfilment of the promise that came through Jesus. Now that the promise is fulfilled, there is no longer any need for the law.

### III Galatians 3:1-5:12 - Direct Appeals to the Galatians

Paul offers a variety of reasons why the Galatians should resist the seductive teaching of the people troubling them. Paul's questions in Galatians also cut like a knife. Having concluded his autobiography, Paul addresses his readers directly with a series of piercing questions. These questions are asked in a tone of rebuke and thus continue the rebuke section of the letter.

Paul rebukes the Galatians for their foolishness. Their defection from the Gospel was caused by their foolish confusion of Gospel and law. Paul's rebuke of their foolish exchange of faith in the Gospel for works of the law is then enforced by an exposition of Scripture (3:6–4:7) to clarify the relationship of the Gospel and the law. After his exposition of Scripture, Paul turns to the Galatians and again rebukes them with further questioning (4:8-11).

At 4:12 Paul turns from rebuke to request. 'Become as I am' is the first imperative in Galatians. It sets the focus for the rest of the request section of the letter. This personal appeal (4:12-20) is followed by a scriptural appeal (4:21-31). Then Paul sets forth his authoritative appeal (5:1-12).

### III.a Galatians 3:1-14 - Law or Faith

Paul moves away from his own experience to that of the Galatians who had heard and received the true Gospel, only to be drawn away from it again by those who profess that keeping the law is a prerequisite to accepting Christ.

Paul provides the example of God's promise to Abraham, who was never a Jew of course, that he would be the spiritual father to all the nations. Since this promise preceded the law and the promise was fulfilled in Christ then the law has nothing to do with having faith in the promise and in Christ through whom salvation came.

Paul then demonstrates from OT Scriptures that the one who lives by the law is the one who lives in the law, yet the law proved to be a curse. Jesus was the one who became the curse for all others by being nailed to the Cross, thus freeing all people from the curse of the law they could never keep.

#### III.a.i Galatians 3:1-5 - The Galatians' experience of conversion

Paul interrogates the Galatians, with five questions in as many verses. They pierce the fog of deception that has descended on the Galatian churches with a searchlight of truth. Paul despairs that they have come under the spell of the false teachers, and so he returns to their experience of how they first came to know Christ and have faith in him alone.

<sup>1</sup> You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!

#### Galatians 3:1

You foolish Galatians! Although Jesus had warned that no one should call another a fool: <<*But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire*>> (Matthew 5:22), Paul does not intend it as an insult but as a description of their behaviour in believing the false teachers who had come in among them. Some scholars prefer to transcribe the word as witless, referring to them as taking leave of their senses or losing the power to think straight. Jesus also used it in this context when addressing disciples on the Emmaus Road: <<*Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!'*>> (Luke 24:25).

Who has bewitched you? Paul uses the language of pagan magic to characterise the pernicious activity of the false teachers and the perilous situation of the Galatians. Their quest for perfection through the law is a drugged illusion from which they must be awakened.

Publicly exhibited or portrayed. Paul believes that his proclamation of the Gospel was so vivid in the Galatians' presence that it was as if they had been eyewitnesses of the crucifixion. They certainly would have known the horrors of crucifixion. The Greek phrase is also translated as portrayed, indicating that Paul has painted a mental image of the Cross.

The perfect tense of the verb crucified indicates that Paul's vivid portrayal of Christ crucified was not only of the historical event but also of the present, saving power of the Cross of Christ for all who believe in him.

<sup>2</sup> The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

### Galatians 3:2

I want to learn from you. Using rhetorical questions, Paul shows how illogical it is for the Galatians to seek a fuller Christian life through observance of the law. Did God give them the Spirit and work miracles in their midst (v.5), because they observed the law? No, it was the result of their hearing the Gospel and believing what you heard, as Paul makes clear: <<*So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ*>> (Romans 10:17), although another NT author indicates there can be failures in hearing: <<*For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened*>> (Hebrews 4:2). The readers are confronted with a clear choice between mutually exclusive alternatives. They are not permitted to accept the 'both-and' synthesis of the false teachers. It is an 'either-or' choice.

Receive the Spirit refers to the new covenant work of the Holy Spirit that comes with saving faith, at the beginning of the Christian life, to sanctify and to empower the believer in life and various kinds of ministry, as it did with Jesus' own chosen disciples even before Pentecost: <<*When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'*>> (John 20:22). Paul knew this experience was so real for the Galatians that they would remember it. Paul writes of this experience to the Thessalonians: <<*because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*>> (1 Thessalonians 1:5a). It was the power behind the message he had come proclaiming to them initially: <<*For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*>> (Romans 1:16), and it is by the Spirit that one makes a confession of faith: <<*Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit*>> (1 Corinthians 12:3). Putting these verses together shows that when the word of the Gospel is preached the Spirit of God works in people's hearts to bring them to faith.

The Galatian converts were excluded from the Jewish nation, and they had not observed the law; but there was no denying that they had experienced God's blessing, the gift of his Spirit. This, Paul says, was what they should be focusing on, not trying to become Jewish!

<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you experience so much for nothing? — if it really was for nothing. <sup>5</sup> Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

## Galatians 3:3-5

Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Paul is incredulous. The Galatians had become part of the spiritual family of God and then, it seems, wanted to become part of the physical family of Abraham by associating themselves with ethnic Israel through circumcision and the keeping of the law. Paul had already told them that this was not necessary - justification is by faith alone!

Paul states that, if they become circumcised, they would be saying that it is not the Spirit that matters but the flesh - the flesh of their foreskins, and the flesh as the whole sphere of existence of humanity in rebellion against God.

In a cultural context this is not a distinction based on Greek dualism where the spirit is good and the flesh inherently evil. Paul's specific point is that the Galatians' alternative is between living by the Spirit, whom they received when they believed the message of Christ crucified, and seeking perfection by circumcision, and other rites such as food laws and Sabbath observance, which would identify them as proselyte Jews. Trying to attain perfection by the flesh in that context meant the attempt to attain spiritual status by conforming to Jewish customs in order to become Jews.

Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you? In v.2 Paul mentioned the Holy Spirit's work at the beginning of the Galatians' Christian lives; here he mentions an ongoing, day-by-day work of the Spirit. Although Paul had left these churches, and there were no other apostles present, the Holy Spirit was still present and was still working miracles in their midst. Paul's question is in a positive voice. It appears that the Galatians were ignoring all the blessing that God had bestowed on them to follow the intriguing promises of the false teachers. The present tense of the participles in the Greek text points to the unchanging character of God, who always gives and works in this way.

The Holy Spirit had performed miracles through Paul during his time in Galatia as well, such as in Iconium: <<*So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through them*>> (Acts 14:3), and: <<*In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And the man sprang up and began to walk*>> (Acts 14:8-10).

By your believing what you heard or by hearing with faith is not only the way to start the Christian life, it is also the way to continue it day by day.

Paul reminds the Galatian Christians of God's miraculous work in their lives so that their faith will be renewed. His questions call for a reaffirmation of faith. The alternatives are posed so that Christians will be compelled by their own experience of the Spirit to choose the right answers: 'Not by observing the law, but by believing what we heard about Christ crucified!' 'Not by flesh, but by the Spirit!' This clear choice will break the spell of any bewitching influence. It is a choice that needs to be reconfirmed every day.

Paul has thus lined up Spirit and faith on the one hand, and flesh and law on the other; this double either/or will be important as the letter proceeds.

### III.a.ii Galatians 3:6-9 - The Gospel in the OT (1): Abraham

Paul issues a second direct appeal to the Galatians: it is not just their own experience of receiving the Gospel by faith that should teach them that salvation is not by the law but by grace. Rather, the OT example of Abraham also teaches that it is through genuine faith, not the law, that one is counted righteous.

Paul defines the identity of the Galatian believers: he compares them to Abraham (v.6), then he identifies them as children of Abraham on the basis of a common family characteristic (v.7); he confirms the identification by quoting Scripture (v.8), and on that basis he includes them in the family blessing (v.9).

<sup>6</sup> Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, <sup>7</sup> so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ <sup>9</sup> For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

#### Galatians 3:6-9

Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’ comes from Genesis 15:6, which is preceded by God’s promise that the elderly, childless Abraham and his wife Sarah would become the ancestors of countless descendants. Abraham accepted God’s promise by faith, even though it may have seemed illogical to do so. Since Abraham is the father of God’s people, his experience with God establishes a guide to the will of God for his people. If the experience of the Galatians can be shown to correspond to the experience of the patriarch, then their experience also conforms to the will of God.

Paul shows the striking similarity between the experience of the Galatians, who believed the preaching of the Cross and received the blessing of the Spirit, and the experience of the great patriarch of God’s people, who believed God’s promise and received the crediting of righteousness. Paul draws two significant parallels between the Galatians’ experience and Abraham’s experience: the human response of faith and the divine blessing enjoyed by those who believe.

It is worthy of note that God issued the identity mark of circumcision shortly after the covenantal promise was made: <<God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you’>> (Genesis 17:9-11). This clearly indicates that the law of circumcision does not save, only faith does. Circumcision was only ever intended as an outward sign that the covenant promise had been made.

Abraham, or Abram as he still was when the promises were made, is the father of God's people, not because he is the biological ancestor of the Jews but because he has a family of spiritual children who follow in his footsteps by believing as he did.

God promised Abraham that he would bring life from his dead body, refer to Romans 4. Thus Abraham is a living OT prophecy of the Gospel, for he was not an Israelite but a pagan, and God justified him by faith.

Those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. In v.16 Paul makes it explicit that belief is in Christ alone and not in the Jewish nation through works of the law or having the badge of circumcision.

Declared the gospel beforehand does not mean that God spoke to Abraham of the Messiah that was to come, although he may have foreseen it in some way. The statement here indicates that God revealed the Gospel of salvation by faith alone.

All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you is taken from Genesis 18:18, which Paul reveals was a declaration of the Gospel to Abraham. Most English translations have 'all the nations' in the Genesis account, although Paul may also have been thinking of the original promise to Abraham: **<<and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed>>** (Genesis 12:3b). It is clear that God's blessing was intended for Jew and Gentile alike with no distinction. Paul understood the OT promise of blessing for the Gentiles as a description and validation of his ministry.

For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. Paul's argument is clear. The only requirement that one needs to become part of God's spiritual family is to have faith in God's promise just as Abraham had.

This comparison with Abraham demonstrates the unity of the Bible. Receiving the blessing of God by faith is the central theme of the entire story of God's people, from the first page to the last.

### III.a.iii Galatians 3:10-14 - The Gospel in the OT (2): Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Habakkuk

Any attempt to be justified by the law leads to a curse, for righteousness comes only by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. All those indwelt by the Holy Spirit enjoy the blessing of Abraham.

Moses had spoken to the Israelites shortly before they entered the Promised Land: **<<See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known>>** (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). It set before the people two paths they could follow. Sadly, history reveals that the majority chose the wrong path. The Gospel of Christ given to the Gentile nations laid out a new, right path to follow: **<<Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'>>** (John 14:6); but the Judaizers wanted the Galatians to tread the well worn path the Jews had chosen.

God had promised his people blessings. The curses spoken of in Deuteronomy were not curses from God but the results of the historic failures of Israel, who ended up exiled in pagan nations for failing to heed God's warnings or fully keep his law.

Meanwhile, Israel's scriptures themselves proclaim that there is a different way through to the promise. Habakkuk, writing at a time when Israel was being devastated, speaks of faith as the only way to life; while Leviticus continues to stress that doing the law is essential for life within the law. But what will happen when the law itself has overturned the people who were bearing the promise? The Jewish Messiah took the curse upon himself, thus releasing the promised blessing.

<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.'

### Galatians 3:10

Paul has just spoken in v.7 about <<*those who believe*>>; now he moves to those who rely on the works of the law. They are in the situation that Paul talked about: <<*But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor*>> (Galatians 2:18). Had Paul rebuilt the house of law, its demands and condemnation would have confronted and confounded him. Those still attached to law observance are in exactly this position. They have failed to obey the law, and so they stand under the curse placed on unfaithful Israel. They stand in contrast to Abraham and all believers, who are blessed (vv.8-9).

Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law comes from Deuteronomy 27:26, counteracting the blessings of the law. Since no one, other than Jesus, ever managed to keep the whole law, all those who had lived under the law were under its curse. This is confirmed by the words of the prophet: <<*You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant*>> (Jeremiah 11:3).

Both Jew and Gentile alike knew that the Jews were God's chosen people, descended from Abraham, who kept his law and circumcised their children as a badge of covenantal membership. Is Paul ignoring this? No, he is simply retelling the same story from a different perspective to that which the Jews had always accepted and held so fiercely to. God's covenant with Abraham was not just for a small nation, it was for everyone. The Jews were just a showcase for what God would do for them when they followed his ways and what would happen to them when they failed to do so. Their failure pointed to the need for a permanent solution, which came through the death and resurrection of his Son and the outpouring of his Spirit. However, the Jewish failure proved to be a barrier to many who wanted to be part of God's family but were being persuaded to follow the law first.

The history of Israel and human experience demonstrates that all fall short of what God demands, refer to Romans 1:18-3:23; and that all are therefore under the curse, because no one is able to keep everything commanded in the Law of Moses.

<sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’

### Galatians 3:11

It is evident that no one is justified before God by the law. The OT itself points out that righteousness cannot be achieved through the law, as Habakkuk 2:4 illustrates: <<*Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith*>>, which Paul quotes from here.

<sup>12</sup> But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’

### Galatians 3:12

Whoever does the works of the law will live by them. Paul uses Leviticus 18:5 to show that the law does not rest on faith. It is likely that Paul means the same thing here that he meant in Romans 10:5, where Leviticus 18:5 is equated with: <<*a righteousness .. that comes from the law*>> (Philippians 3:9b), in contrast to: <<*the righteousness that comes from faith*>> (Romans 10:6a). What this is saying is that anyone who keeps the whole law perfectly shall live in the law, but one failure in obedience to the law leads to death: <<*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*>> (Romans 6:23).

Some interpreters argue that the one who does them shall live by them, Leviticus 18:5 in its original context, had to do with the temporal blessing and fullness of life that would come to the one who ‘does’ the law. However, it also seems to be a conditional promise within the law indicating that obedience would lead to righteousness: <<*If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right*>> (Deuteronomy 6:25); this promise, however, remains unfulfilled because it relies on the fulfilling of a condition that could never happen, i.e. it relies on a human ‘doing of the law’ in a complete and sufficient way.

Others argue the original context of Leviticus 18:5 mainly concerns the means of enjoying life under God’s pleasure by keeping God’s statutes and rules. Because some think the meaning of Leviticus 18:5 in the original context is incompatible with the negative way in which Paul is using the verse here, they believe Paul is citing it as a misused slogan of the Judaizers. It seems better, however, to understand Paul as reading Leviticus 18:5 typologically; that is, as seeing life in the land of Israel as a typological reference to eternal life.

In the Mosaic covenant, salvation was through faith in God’s promise and his atonement, culminating in the Messiah. But now that the new covenant has come, those who insist on the entrance requirements of the old covenant do not have the benefit of sacrifices, so they must ‘do’ all that the Mosaic Law requires in order to ‘live’ eternally, as Paul confirms later in the letter: <<*Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law*>> (Galatians 5:3).

<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ –

### Galatians 3:13

Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree is a quote from Deuteronomy 21:23 and was later used by Peter to indicate the sin of the Jews in killing Jesus: <<*The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree*>> (Acts 5:30). The divine curse is the result of disobedience to the law (v.10). But the burden of the curse has been lifted by Christ’s work on the Cross. In Galatians 2:20 Paul spoke of Christ’s death for him personally; now he focuses on Christ’s substitutionary work for all others, i.e. Christ redeemed us.

<sup>14</sup> in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

### Galatians 3:14

Christ hanging on a tree (v.13) not only brought blessing to Israel but took place in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles. The coming of the Spirit in new power is one of the central benefits of the new age brought in by Christ, as indicated by the prophet: <<*For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring*>> (Isaiah 44:3). Believers not only have forgiveness of sins, but also the living presence of God with them. Paul explains more of what it means to have the gift of the Spirit in Galatians chapters 5 and 6.

### III.b Galatians 3:15-18 - The Promise to Abraham

The Sinai covenant was an interim covenant that did not contradict the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul uses an everyday example to explain the place of the law in God’s scheme. A covenant, inheritance trust or a will cannot be changed, and neither can the promises made to Abraham and to his offspring be changed just because a law has come into the picture.

<sup>15</sup> Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. <sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, as of many; but it says, ‘And to your offspring’, that is, to one person, who is Christ.

### Galatians 3:15-16

Once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. A person usually writes a will so that, after death, there should be no dispute as to what the person wanted to happen either in terms of their funeral arrangements or the disposal of their earthly assets. It is a legal document that cannot be added to or amended in any way. Paul uses this analogy to show that God had ‘willed’ his promise of salvation to all nations through Abraham. The giving of the law to Israel

through Moses did not alter the original will. It was given for an entirely different purpose to the Abrahamic promise, which still stands.

The type of will Paul has in mind here is a legal term for an irrevocable trust agreement that cannot be legally challenged or altered at a later date. Unless it is legally withdrawn by the originator it cannot be nullified.

The promises were made to Abraham. God spoke promises to Abraham on several occasions, but probably: <<*for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever*>> (Genesis 13:15), <<*And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God*>> (Genesis 17:8), are particularly in view. The prophet confirmed the reliability of God's promises: <<*You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old*>> (Micah 7:20).

And to your offspring. Paul knows that the singular, Hebrew *zera'*, which means seed, can be used as a collective singular that has a plural sense; therefore, he interprets it in a plural sense in: <<*Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be'*>> (Romans 4:18). Usually, the plural sense of descendants was taken to refer to the nation of Israel.

However, it also can have a singular meaning, and here Paul, knowing that only in Christ would the promised blessings come to the Gentiles, sees that the most true and ultimate fulfilment of these OT promises comes to one offspring, namely, to one person, who is Christ. Paul's willingness to make an argument using a singular noun in distinction from its plural form, which occurs in other OT verses, indicates a high level of confidence in the trustworthiness of the small details of the OT text. Some commentators believe that either seed or offspring are best understood to refer to God's family, and that family is those who are in Christ.

Paul is not out of line with accepted rabbinic exegesis as they apply the singular meaning to Scripture where it refers to individuals such as Isaac, David and Solomon. What Paul demonstrates here is that one does not need to belong to the plural nation of Israel to share in the blessing promised to Abraham; they need to be in the singular definition - Christ!

<sup>17</sup> My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

### Galatians 3:17

The law, which came four hundred and thirty years later. Paul is apparently referring to the Septuagint translation of Exodus 12:40, <<*The dwelling of the children of Israel ... in Egypt and in Canaan was 430 years*>>, which would mean 430 years from Abraham to the exodus; the Hebrew text does not include 'and in Canaan'. Another explanation is that Paul is not counting the time from the first statement of the promise to Abraham but from the last affirmation of that promise to Jacob before he went to Egypt in Genesis 46:3-4. This method would then count the entire time in Egypt as the time from the promise to the law. If

this is so, then Paul is relying on the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:40 to affirm the 430-year stay in Egypt.

The law, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God. The law in no way affected the covenant, not to annul or supersede it. The law was given and pertained only to the Jews, while the covenant included all nations through faith in Christ. The law has no provision of salvation through works, only the curse of death, and only to the Jews or others who bound themselves to the law.

Paul's point here is to highlight the precedence that the promise had over the law in salvation history and therefore the law could never nullify the promise.

<sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

### Galatians 3:18

In Galatians 2:21 Paul said that if righteousness comes through the law, Christ died for nothing. Here he says similarly, if the inheritance comes from the law, the promise is not the basis for it: <<*If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void*>> (Romans 4:14). Paul is concerned to demonstrate the unconditional nature of the promises made to Abraham. He points out the incompatibility between receiving the inheritance as a free gift on the basis of a promise and receiving it as a payment for keeping the law, which was only given long after the promise was made to Abraham: <<*For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness*>> (Romans 4:3-5).

God granted it to Abraham through the promise. Just as Paul received the Gospel by divine revelation from the Lord, Abraham received the promise with the same irrefutable authentication. Since the gift character of the promised inheritance is clearly established, the inheritance cannot be received as a payment for keeping the law. This logical argument is developed by Paul to drive home his rebuke for the foolish error of viewing something as a payment which had already been received as a gift.

### III.c Galatians 3:19-4:7 - The Purpose of the Law

The law was never intended to be in force forever. The promise was given to Abraham and his biological family who, as members of the human race, were not only part of the solution but also part of the problem. Something was required to bridge the gap between the promise and its fulfilment in Christ.

Therefore, God gave the law to the Hebrew nation via Moses but it was only ever intended as a temporary measure, a remedy to allay the spread of the sickness but not cure it, until a permanent cure could be found. That would come through the promise and now that the promised Messiah has come, those who believe in him are sons of God.

<sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

### Galatians 3:19

Why then the law? The question then arises: If the law has no impact on God's plan rooted in his promise, why was the law ever given? Simply put, all people are under sin and the perfect law could only deal with the sin if the people themselves could become perfect. They could not, and the law was given to show them this; the law is the standard by which the transgression is measured.

It was added indicates that the law was never intended to be the central part of God's redemptive plan but just a temporary addition to show the people the standards of righteousness, as well as serving as a measure to demonstrate just how far short they fall from God's standards.

Because of transgressions might mean:

1. To provide a sacrificial system to deal temporarily with transgressions.
2. To teach people more clearly what God requires and thereby to restrain transgressions.
3. To show that transgressions violated an explicit written law.
4. To indicate just how far from God and his righteousness people were living.
5. To reveal people's sinfulness and their need of a saviour, i.e. **<<through the law comes knowledge of sin>>** (Romans 3:20b).

All five senses are theologically true, but the last is probably uppermost in Paul's mind.

Until the offspring would come is a reference to Jesus, as already noted. It also indicates that the law was only temporal. This theme differs radically from the common Jewish perspective of his day, which emphasised the eternal, immutable nature of the law. Paul had come to realise that it was only Christ who is eternal.

It was ordained through angels by a mediator: **<<He said: The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own>>** (Deuteronomy 33:2), talks about God coming from Sinai, where he gave the law, with the angels present with God, acting on his behalf in all they do: **<<You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it>>** (Acts 7:53), although their role is only part of the story: **<<For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will>>** (Hebrews 2:2-4).

Moses was God's mediator in the gift of the law to Israel: **<<These are the statutes and ordinances and laws that the Lord established between himself**

*and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses>> (Leviticus 26:46), <<At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words of the Lord>> (Deuteronomy 5:5a), and: <<The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ>> (John 1:17). The Mosaic Law was part of a temporary covenant never intended to last forever. Now that Jesus has come as the true offspring or seed of Abraham, the Mosaic Law is no longer in force. Therefore, circumcision is no longer required, since it is part of the Mosaic covenant.*

<sup>20</sup> Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

### Galatians 3:20

Paul made sure that it is clearly understood that God was one party in the mediation; the Israelites were the second party. Moses was a mediator between them; this mediation which was about the Law, in no way affects the promise for it includes all nations. There was more than one party involved in the presentation of the law to Israel, which involved a mediator, Moses. Elsewhere, Paul identifies that the mediator is now Christ: <<*For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human*>> (1 Timothy 2:5)

Because God is one, his ultimate revelation comes not through a mediator but from him alone. This assumes that whatever comes from Christ comes from the one true God, for Christ is fully God: <<*The Father and I are one*>> (John 10:30). This lies behind Paul's earlier protestation about the Gospel coming to him not from or through a human being but directly from God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: <<*Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead*>> (Galatians 1:1).

This verse highlights the universality of God over the particularity of the law that was mediated through many people towards a select few. The Judaizers were claiming that God is the God of the Jews only and therefore Gentiles had to become Jews in order to receive the promise. The universality of God shows that he is the God of everyone: <<*Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith*>> (Romans 3:29-30).

These arguments against the supremacy of the Mosaic Law should not be interpreted to mean that Paul is antinomian, totally against the law. He is, after all, showing that the law had an important place in the redemptive plan of God. But the giving of the law was not the final goal of God's plan. The law was an essential step, but only a step, toward the ultimate fulfilment of God's promises in Christ. Christ is the beginning, end and centre of God's plan.

<sup>21</sup> Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

### Galatians 3:21

The law is certainly not opposed to the promises of God; since both the law and the promise were given by God, they must be complementary rather than contradictory in the overall plan of God. Paul regards the law as: <<*holy and just and good*>> (Romans 7:12b). However, because of human sinfulness, the law was never able to make alive: <<*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh*>> (Romans 8:3). No law, not even the perfect law of God, could counteract the sinful nature of human kind imputed through original sin: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23).

<sup>22</sup> But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

### Galatians 3:22

The law, i.e. the Scripture, instead of giving life with God, imprisoned all things under the power of sin; refer to Romans 3:9-20. So rather than enabling Israelites, indeed Paul uses the more universal argument all things, to have access to what was promised, the law was given so that the single offspring, Christ, would receive the blessing. The blessing is obtained by all others through faith, not by individual obedience to or works of the law. God was certainly not surprised by the fact that the Israelites were unable to obey the law. In fact, at the end of the giving of the law, Moses foretold that the Israelites would not obey it, refer to Deuteronomy 31:24-29. Thus the law confirmed the promise to Abraham that justification would come only by faith (vv.6-9, v.14, and v.18).

Paul sees it as essential to distinguish between these two functions of the law: the universal condemnatory function and the particular supervisory function. Every person in the whole world in every time and every race is under the condemnation of the law given in Scripture. The law makes it clear that everyone is a prisoner of sin in order that it may be absolutely clear that the salvation promised by God can be received only by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul's argument indicates that the law should not be viewed as contradictory to the Gospel. By reducing all to the level of sinners, the law prepares the way for the Gospel. But neither should the law be viewed as if it were the same as the Gospel. The law has a negative purpose: it makes people aware of their sin. However, it does not, indeed it cannot, set anyone free from bondage to sin. As already stated, the promise of blessing comes only through faith in Christ.

<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

### Galatians 3:23

Before faith came. By faith Paul means new covenant faith in Christ (v.22). Thus he is saying, 'before Christ came and along with him new covenant faith in him'. Since Paul is using Abraham as an example of justification by faith, he cannot

mean that there was no saving faith before Christ came, but only that there was no new covenant faith resting on the knowledge of Christ's finished work. Hebrews 11 is a great example of just how many from the OT were saved through faith in what had not yet been revealed in its fullness during their lifetimes.

We were imprisoned and guarded under the law. The law was both restrictive and protective: <<*For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all*>> (Romans 11:32); it was also very necessary during the intervening period between the promise to Abraham and its fulfilment in Christ. If one views sin as an illness, what the law did was to try to keep God's people in quarantine until the cure became available, that is, the coming of Jesus in whom faith would be revealed.

Paul expands and dramatises his explanation of the negative function of the law by personifying the law as a jailer and a disciplinarian. In his portrayal of the roles given by God to the law, Paul shows that these negative roles are a necessary but temporary part of the entire drama of God's plan of salvation.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

#### Galatians 3:24

The law, as disciplinarian, had the positive functions of highlighting and restraining transgressions, and also of foretelling the coming of Christ: <<*For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*>> (Romans 10:4).

Paul here uses the metaphor of the law playing the role of guide, caretaker and teacher of children, preparing them, especially through the sacrifices, to be prepared to understand and accept Christ. Only he could provide justification, which is accepted by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

#### Galatians 3:25-26

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian. Paul uses the first person plural to indicate the freedom now enjoyed by the Jewish Christians who have been released from the restrictions of the disciplinarian law, later going so far as to say: <<*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son*>> (Colossians 1:13).

You are all children of God. The shift of emphasis should be noted as Paul moves from the 'we' of the former experience of the Jew under the law to 'you', the people now under the grace that came through God's Son: <<*The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*>> (John 1:17). This is the crucial difference between old covenant and new covenant believers: life under the law was slavery; life in Christ is marked by the freedom that comes from being God's children, literally sons. Both men and women are here

characterised as having the rights of sons, because with sonship comes the right of inheritance.

The Greek word *huioi*, sons but translated children here, is a legal term used in the adoption and inheritance laws of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Rome. As used by Paul here and elsewhere in his letters: *<<For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God>>* (Romans 8:14-16), and: *<<in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God>>* (Galatians 4:5-7), this term refers to the status of all Christians, both men and women, who, having been adopted into God's family, now enjoy all the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights of God's children: *<<He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God>>* (John 1:11-13).

<sup>27</sup> As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

### Galatians 3:27

In addition to sonship (v.26), Paul adds two more pictures of what is involved in this new age. Being baptised, believers have gone down into death, dying to the old era of law, sin and death: *<<Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life>>* (Romans 6:3-4), *<<For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ>>* (Galatians 2:19), and: *<<May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world>>* (Galatians 6:14); and have come up out of the water as participants in the new creation: *<<So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!>>* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Clothed yourselves with Christ. The language of 'putting on', as used of clothing, suggests taking on a new life and purpose through being spiritually united to Christ. In the OT there are many references to being clothed with righteousness, salvation, strength and glory that Paul is alluding to here: *<<Now rise up, O Lord God, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your faithful rejoice in your goodness>>* (2 Chronicles 6:41), *<<I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban>>* (Job 29:14), *<<Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your faithful shout for joy>>* (Psalm 132:9), *<<Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come>>* (Proverbs 31:25), *<<I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being*

*shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels>> (Isaiah 61:10), and: <<Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' And to him he said, 'See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you in festal apparel.' And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him in the apparel; and the angel of the Lord was standing by>> (Zechariah 3:3-5).*

In other letters Paul uses this metaphor of putting on clothing to mean taking on the virtues of Christ: <<As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience>> (Colossians 3:12), and: <<But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation>> (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Just as baptism pictures the initial union with Christ by faith, being clothed with Christ portrays a believer's participation in the moral perfection of Christ by faith.

<sup>28</sup> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

### Galatians 3:28

There is no longer Jew or Greek. The fact that the Mosaic law has been left behind in the old age means that, in the new creation, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is broken down; refer to Ephesians 2:11-22. Certainly these Galatians do not have to become Jews in order to be Christians (v.14). The new vertical relationship with God results in a new horizontal relationship with one another. All racial, economic and gender barriers, and all other inequalities are removed in Christ. The equality and unity of all in Christ are not an addition, a tangent or an optional application of the Gospel. They are part of the essence of the Gospel.

There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female does not imply that there are no distinctions in how these groups should act, for Paul commands slaves, i.e. bondservants, and masters differently in Ephesians 6:5-9; and husbands and wives differently in Ephesians 5:22-33. Paul clearly is not advocating the elimination of all distinctions or the acceptability of same-sex marriage or homosexual relations: <<For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error>> (Romans 1:26-27). Rather, he teaches that old divisions and wrongful attitudes of superiority and inferiority are abolished, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. He does not take away the distinction between men and women but says they are united, joined together in one body, the church. The verse teaches unity within diversity but not sameness. God showed no distinction

when he promised his Spirit: <<*Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit*>> (Joel 2:29).

<sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

### Galatians 3:29

Paul had explained that believers do belong to Christ: <<*So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God*>> (1 Corinthians 3:21-23), providing their faith is genuine: <<*Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!*>> (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Abraham's offspring. Paul restates the main point of his argument: those who belong to Christ are part of Abraham's spiritual family, and hence they do not need to be circumcised to become part of God's people. They are members through Christ and will inherit the promises made to Abraham.

Heirs according to the promise. This refers to being co-heirs with Jesus and was discussed in comments made on vv.25-26.

The overarching message from Paul is church unity. When one considers how the church has become divided into different denominations, however historically justifiable they may seem, it is likely that the church today falls under God's judgement when it is viewed through this chapter.