

Galatians 3

A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss

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Paul Explained Justification

Galatians 3:1-9

Limits of the Text

In the first five verses Paul asked five questions. He used the experiences of the Galatian churches to remind them how they were declared righteous. In verses 6-9 Paul reiterated the same point using the example of Abraham. Thus these two paragraphs are related and form one text.

Translation

1 Oh foolish Galatians! Who deceived **you**, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was vividly described *as* having been crucified? 2 I desire to learn **only one thing** from you: Did you receive the Spirit **by works of the law** or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now being completed by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer **so much** to no avail? (That is, if *it* really *was* to no avail.) 5 So, *is* the one who is giving the Spirit to you and working miracles among you *doing so* by works of the law or by the hearing of faith?

6 In the same way, Abraham “trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” 7 So then, understand that people of faith are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, having foreseen that God would declare the nations righteous **by faith**, preached the gospel in advance to Abraham *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you,” 9 so that people of faith are blessed together with Abraham who had faith.

Interpretation

Galatians 2:15-21 served as a transitional section, simultaneously completing Paul’s rebuke of Peter and laying out the main theological points for the letter. In chapter 3, Paul began to unpack this theology, explaining it in more detail.

In this first paragraph (3:1-5), Paul used diatribe¹ in an effort to get the Galatians to remember their initial experience after hearing the gospel.² Paul’s argument was based on their experiences; he knew that right theology had led to their right living (experiences). “Although experience in itself is not an entirely reliable evidence of spiritual reality, it is nevertheless a powerful apologetic when closely linked with and built on scriptural truth.”³ If Paul could get them to remember their right living,

¹ In modern English, diatribe is defined as “bitter, sharply abusive denunciation, attack, or criticism” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/diatribe>), but in New Testament literature it is a “form in which the speaker confronts and debates with an imaginary addressee in order to instruct his audience” (Bailey, 38).

² Longenecker, 99.

³ MacArthur, 63.

perhaps he could get them to remember and re-embrace the right theology.⁴

1 ὦ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἑσταυρωμένος;⁵

1 Oh foolish Galatians! Who deceived **you**, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was vividly described *as* having been crucified?

Paul addressed his readers with a biting tone and called them foolish (ἀνόητοι), which means they were lacking in spiritual understanding⁶ and discernment. This word is used in Ti 3:3 to describe the condition of believers before coming to Christ.

The Galatians were foolish because they had been deceived. Deceived (ἐβάσκανεν) literally meant to exert an evil influence through the eye, thus it had the idea of using magic on someone; it could be translated as casting a spell on someone or giving them the evil eye. Paul didn't believe the Galatians had literally been ensorcelled; he was using the word metaphorically to mean deceived or tricked. The Galatians were foolish for letting the Judaizers deceive them.

The Galatians had been deceived into changing their understanding of Jesus. Paul's preaching had vividly described Jesus to the Galatians. Vividly described (προεγράφη) can have the idea of a painter or a sculptor creating a work in such a way that everyone can clearly understand what is being depicted, or it can mean to proclaim something on a placard in public.⁷ More generally, this word means to provide information in a vivid manner. Paul had preached so clearly and obviously that he asserted there was no way the Galatians could have misinterpreted his message.

Jesus had been vividly, clearly described as God come to earth and crucified for them. Crucified (ἑσταυρωμένος) is in the perfect tense, meaning this message was still meaningful for the Galatians. "The cross is the continuing and eternal payment for all sin, and every sinner who puts his trust in the cross is forever and continually being forgiven. A believer can no more stay saved by works than could have been saved by works in the first place."⁸

Paul knew there was no way the Galatians could have missed his message, so he was not sure how they could have been deceived into believing something else. Thus he asked them in the next verse.

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

⁴ George, 211.

⁵ The Greek text is NA27.

⁶ Longenecker, 99.

⁷ Arndt, 867. Today we use billboards in a similar manner.

⁸ MacArthur, 65.

2 I desire to learn **only one thing** from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by the hearing of faith?

This question is the crux of Paul's argument; the others flow around this one. Paul believed that the Galatian churches had received the Holy Spirit. How he knew this is not stated, but it was clear to Paul. He asked by what method did they receive the Spirit: Was it by works of the law or was it by the hearing of faith? This is the same contrast (works vs. faith) that he began in 2:16: "Perceiving that a person is not declared righteous by works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ..." Works of the law represents obedience to the Mosaic law. The hearing of faith represents believing (trusting) in the message of Jesus that Paul had preached to them. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17, NASB95). "These are not merely two kinds of human activities but rather alternative ways of approaching God."⁹ Paul wanted them to remember that the Spirit came by the latter (faith), not the former (works).

3 οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἐστε, ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελεῖσθε;

3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now being completed by the flesh?

Although these are broken into two questions in English, they are one question in Greek. The main idea of Paul's question is this: It is foolish to think that salvation begins one way (faith) and then progresses a completely different way (works).

Paul again called his readers foolish (ἀνόητοί), the same word he used in 3:1. They were foolish if they thought the flesh could complete them after the Spirit started them. Beginning (ἐναρξάμενοι) refers to the start point of their salvation, which is justification, and being completed (ἐπιτελεῖσθε) refers to what they were working on now, which is sanctification. Paul's argument is that it is incongruent for these two things to be achieved in antithetical manners.

If we mirror-read this verse, we might hear the Judaizers saying something like this, "Yes, it's good for you Galatians to trust Jesus for your salvation, but that's just the starting point! To mature, to be complete, you must please God by your lifestyle and your actions as well. Do you know how to do that? No, of course you don't; Paul didn't reveal that part to you. But we Judaizers have good news! God himself revealed this to us many years ago through the great prophet Moses. We know everything that is necessary to please God and grow into spiritual maturity. Come, let us show you!" It was undoubtedly a convincing argument, and it fooled these immature believers.

What does one who is wise believe? He believes that the Holy Spirit justifies, and the

⁹ George, 212.

Holy Spirit sanctifies.

4 τσαυτα επαθετε εικη; ει γε και εικη.

4 Did you suffer **so much** to no avail? (That is, if *it* really *was* to no avail.)

Paul asked if the Galatians had suffered so much to no avail. The verb used in this verse (επαθετε), which I translated as “suffer,” can have a couple different meanings, which would give the question a different meaning. One, this verb can have a general meaning of experiences. So the question would be, “Did you experience so much to no avail?” Experiences would refer to God’s working in the lives of believers within the church. He’s saving people, changing people, doing miracles, and so on. If this is correct, then the sense of the verse is this: Did you experience God’s working for no reason? Were these experiences of no value to you? Are you going to forget these and turn to obeying the Mosaic law? That is pointless! There are three difficulties with this meaning. One, the significance of Paul’s argument is minimal. They’ve moved from one spiritual experience to another; that’s not pointless. Two, verses 3 and 5 already talk about spiritual experiences, thus making this verse somewhat redundant. Three, this word is used 42 times in the New Testament, and it never has this meaning. So while this meaning is possible, it’s unlikely.

Two, this verb can also have the more specific meaning of suffering persecution for believing. If that’s what it means here, then the sense of the verse is this: Did you suffer for no reason? Paul asked what’s the point in having suffered when you could have avoided it all by obeying the Mosaic law in the first place.¹⁰ That was pointless! There are two difficulties with this interpretation. One, there is no record, either in this book or in Acts, that the Galatians suffered. But as nearly all Christians in the Roman Empire suffered, whether Scripture recorded it or not, this is probably not a very strong argument. Two, at first glance, suffering does not seem to fit the context of “beginning by the Spirit” (3:3) and “working miracles among you” (3:5). On the other hand, an environment where people are genuinely justified and experiencing God’s working seems like exactly the kind of place that suffering would occur. So although these are difficulties, they aren’t substantial. This is the more likely meaning of the verb.

Paul inserted a parenthetical “if it really was to no avail” after his question, leaving open the possibility that the Galatians had not really apostatized after all. It seems that he really didn’t know, so he went back and forth in his thinking.

5 ο ουν επιχορηγων υμιν το πνευμα και ενεργων δυναμεις εν υμιν, εξ εργων νομου η εξ ακοης πιστεως;

5 So, *is* the one who is giving the Spirit to you and working miracles among you *doing so*

¹⁰ Judaism was a religion officially recognized by Rome.

by works of the law or by the hearing of faith?

This verse begins with a “so” (οὕτως), a particle that denotes “that what it introduces is the result of or an inference from what precedes.”¹¹ This question is the logical conclusion of all that has happened: Jesus was preached, they received the Spirit, salvation began, they suffered for their faith, and they were seeing more people getting saved and miracles being done.¹² It was in this setting that Paul asked his final question.

The “one giving” and the “one working” is the same person, namely God, whose name the Jews avoided speaking. Paul was asking, “How does God do what he does among you?” He was calling upon the Galatians to remember, much like the other rhetorical questions.

God gave the Holy Spirit, and God worked miracles. What does this mean? It might mean that the Galatians themselves experienced charismatic events. They spoke in tongues, performed miracles, and so on. Or it might mean they received the Holy Spirit (as other Gentiles had) and witnessed God’s apostle, Paul, performing miracles among them, which were God’s means of validating his message (2 Co 12:12). Either is possible.

Whichever position is correct, it does not altar the main point of the question: How is it that God works among people? Is it when they obey the law, or when they have faith in him? The answer is obvious: When they have faith! Insignificant human resources cannot hope to enhance the Father’s Spirit-endowed power.¹³

Longenecker summarizes the first five verses of the chapter like this: “Paul...was not content to allow any supplement to the work of Christ, either for one’s initial acceptance before God or for one’s life as a Christian. For him, to start talking about supplements was to bring matters back to square one.”¹⁴

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

6 In the same way, Abraham “trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

In the previous paragraph (3:1-5), Paul argued for salvation by faith based upon the Galatians’ experiences. But experiences alone are never enough to determine truth, so starting in 3:6 he continued the same idea but used an example from Scripture to make his point. The argument that Paul made in 3:6-9 was probably countering a claim made by the Judaizers. They probably said something like, “Abraham was a man justified by faith, and he still had to be circumcised to be in the covenant, thus so should you.”

¹¹ Ardent, 736.

¹² Longenecker, 105.

¹³ MacArthur, 69.

¹⁴ Longenecker, 106.

“In the same way” (Καθὼς) compares the Galatians’ experiences (3:1-5) with Abraham’s experiences; both are similar in that they had faith in God. Paul quoted from Ge 15:16, which says, “Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (HCSB). When the Galatians had faith, they were justified (3:3); when Abraham had faith, he was justified. Paul established a relationship, a similarity, between the Galatians and Abraham.

Longenecker has a long *excursus* in his commentary on Jewish writings about Abraham during the time of Paul.¹⁵ The gist of these writings is this: Abraham was an example of faith *because* he was obedient to be circumcised, thus anticipating the Mosaic law. So faith and obedience were both necessary to make Abraham righteous. The Judaizers were probably thinking along these lines and used Abraham as an example to the Galatians.

Paul agreed that Abraham was a good example, but for a different reason than the Judaizers claimed. As Longenecker points out, the problem with these Jewish writings is that they misrepresent what Abraham did. The Judaizers had ignored the fact that this “crediting as righteousness” occurred many years before the command to be circumcised. Credited (ἐλογίσθη) is a word from mathematics and accounting; it brings to mind credits, debits, and commercial accounts.¹⁶ When Abraham believed, God made a deposit into his righteousness account.

There’s great irony here: Abraham was righteous when he was still a Gentile, before his name was changed, and before he was circumcised. Abraham had faith in God, and this alone is why he was righteous. That was Paul’s point in this verse.

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

7 So then, understand that people of faith are the sons of Abraham.

The Galatians had faith, thus they were among the spiritual descendants of Abraham. People of faith (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως) are those whose lives are full of faith or are marked by faith. It refers to “people who trust God like Abraham trusted God.” Those kinds of people are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. This is a timeless truth: People from any generation who have faith in God are Abraham’s descendants. There is only one way to be justified, and that is through faith. John MacArthur says it like this: “At no time in history...has *any* person been brought in saving relationship to God by any other means than faith.”¹⁷

“Father Abraham had many sons,
and many sons had Father Abraham.

¹⁵ Longenecker, 110-112.

¹⁶ Louw, 1:582.

¹⁷ MacArthur, 75.

I am one of them, and so are you.
So let's just praise the Lord!
Right arm..."

8 προῖδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεὸς, προεηγγελίαστο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη·

8 And the Scripture, having foreseen that God would declare the nations righteous by faith, preached the gospel in advance to Abraham saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you,"

The main thought in this verse is "the Scripture preached the gospel." Temporally subsequent to this is the statement that God would declare the nations righteous, which is a restatement of the previous verse. So point is this: When God said to Abraham, "All the nations will be blessed in you,"¹⁸ he was actually giving the message of the gospel.

How could this be the gospel? The blessing of the nations was not the Jewish people, the Mosaic law, the great King David, Solomon's temple, or the message of the prophets, though these were all blessings. The blessing is that all nations can be declared righteous just like Abraham was declared righteous, which is by faith. Specifically, they can have faith in Abraham's descendant, Jesus.

9 ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ.

9 so that people of faith are blessed together with Abraham who had faith.

In this verse Paul brought it all together and finished his argument. If God blessed Abraham and if anyone who believes like Abraham believed is righteous and is Abraham's descendant, then "anyone" will be blessed with Abraham. And "anyone" includes "all the nations." "Paul could claim that the faith of Abraham was the same as ours with this noticeable difference: He believed in the Christ who was to come, just as we trust in the One who has already come."¹⁹

To summarize 3:6-9: Anyone who trusts God like Abraham trusted God is credited with righteousness, is his spiritual descendant, and will be blessed with Abraham's blessing.

¹⁸ This quote is part of God's promise to Abraham, "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Ge 12:3, NASB95).

¹⁹ George, 226.

Structural Diagram

Who deceived **you**
before whose eyes
Jesus Christ was described as having been crucified?

Did you receive the Spirit **by works of the law**
or
by the hearing of faith?

After beginning by the Spirit
are you now being completed by the flesh?

Did you suffer **so much** to no avail?

So *is* the one *doing so* by works of the law
who is giving the Spirit to you or
and by the hearing of faith?
working miracles among you

In the same way
Abraham "trusted God,
and
it was credited to him as righteousness."

So then
understand
that people of faith are the sons of Abraham.

And
having foreseen
| that God would declare the nations righteous **by faith**,
|
the Scripture preached the gospel
in advance to Abraham *saying*,
All the nations will be blessed in you

so that
people of faith are blessed together with Abraham who had faith.

Tracing the Argument

External – Having defended his apostleship in chapters 1 and 2 and laid out his understanding of being declared righteous through faith in Jesus alone in his rebuke of Peter (2:15-21), Paul began a more thorough explanation of justification. In this section, he argues that salvation begins and continues through faith in Jesus alone.

Internal – Paul first argued based on their experiences, but knowing that experiences are subjective, he made the same argument based on Scripture, using the example of Abraham.

Textual Outline

1. The Galatians were declared righteous through faith in Jesus alone (3:1-5).

- a. They heard Jesus described as crucified (3:1).
 - b. They believed the message they heard (3:2).
 - c. The Spirit worked in their lives (3:3-5).
2. Abraham was declared righteous through faith in God alone (3:6-9).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 3:1-9 in order to remind the Galatians that they were declared righteous through faith in Jesus alone.

Teaching Outline

God declares people righteous when they put their faith in Jesus alone. And I want you to remember that God declared you righteous when you put your faith in Jesus. For our text today, we are going to find 3 reminders of being declared righteous.

1. Remember that God declared you righteous when the cross was described (3:1).
2. Remember that God declared you righteous when you believed his word (3:2).
3. Remember that God declared you righteous when the Spirit worked (3:3-5).

Galatians 3:10-18

Limits of the Text

The two paragraphs in this section (3:10-14 and 3:15-18) explain what the law was not good for; each gives a limitation of the Mosaic law, one reason why obeying the law could not have helped the Galatians to be righteous. The next paragraph (3:19-25) transitions to explaining what the law was good for.

Translation

10 So as many as are *righteous* by works of law, they are under a curse, for it has been written, “Cursed *is* everyone who is not continuing in everything which has been written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 And *it is* obvious that no one has been declared righteous **in the law** in the sight of God, because “The righteous will live by faith;” 12 and the law is not of faith, **but** “the one who has done” them “will live because of them.” 13 Christ redeemed **us** from the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf, because it has been written, “Cursed *is* everyone hanging upon a cross,” 14 so that the blessing of Abraham might come **to the nations** in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive **the promise of the Spirit** through faith.

15 Brothers, let me give a human example: No one invalidates or adds to a man’s last will and testament after it has been validated. 16 Now the promises were spoken **to Abraham** and to his descendant. He does not say “and to descendants,” referring to many, but “and to your descendant” referring to one, who is Christ. 17 This is what I’m saying: The law, which came to exist 430 years later, did not invalidate **the covenant, which had been validated previously by God**, resulting in the invalidation of the promise. 18 For if the inheritance *is* by law, then *it is* not by promise; God has graciously given *it to Abraham through the promise*.

Interpretation

In this section Paul continued to argue that salvation is by faith alone using Scripture. He turned from using Abraham as an example (3:6-9) to using the law. This argument is probably counters another claim made by the Judaizers. Presumably they would have extolled the salvific virtues of the law, but Paul extolled it for a different purpose: It is not “the source of obtaining righteousness but rather...the gauge of damnation. The law tells us what we are being saved from—the curse.”²⁰

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

²⁰ George, 229.

10 So as many as are *righteous* by works of law, they are under a curse, for it has been written, “Cursed is everyone who is not continuing in everything which has been written in the book of the law, to do them.”

Paul asserted that some people, typically Jewish people, were trying to be declared righteous by doing the works required by the law. The previous verses spoke about those who heard the message of the cross by faith (3:2, 5); they might be called “people of faith.” Paul considered himself in this group and had taught the Galatians to be as well. Paul contrasted them with “as many as are righteous by works of law;” they might be called “people of law.” The Judaizers were in this group and were persuading the Galatians. There doesn’t seem to be any middle of ground; one is either a person of faith or a person of law.²¹

Those who are people of law are under a curse. To be cursed (Ἐπικατάρατος) is to be under divine condemnation.²² The Judaizers would have claimed God’s approval for themselves not his condemnation, yet Paul found this condemnation within the law itself. Dt 27:26 says, “‘Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (NASB95).²³ In order for a person to be declared righteous by works of law, one must be continually doing everything written in the law without exception. The Judaizers may have focused on the importance of *doing* the commands, but Paul focused on the consequences of not doing *all* of them.²⁴ Although the Judaizers would not have seen it this way, Paul’s point was that doing all the law is an impossible standard, so if the Galatians put themselves under the law, they would be under a curse.

11 ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται· 12 ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.

11 And *it is* obvious that no one has been declared righteous **in the law** in the sight of God, because “The righteous will live by faith;” 12 and the law is not of faith, **but** “the one who has done” them “will live because of them.”

It is obvious that no one has been declared righteous in the law in the sight of God. God’s sight (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ) is a reference to his judgment;²⁵ God sets the standards for declaring or not declaring someone righteous. Paul asserted it was obvious that righteousness can’t come from the law. Something obvious (δῆλον) is clearly visible,

²¹ This contrasting of those who are blessed with those who are cursed is reminiscent of Dt 27-28, where the Israelites stood on the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim and traded “blessed be’s” and “cursed be’s” with each other.

²² Arndt, 373.

²³ James would later write something similar: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (Ja 2:10, NASB95).

²⁴ Longenecker, 117.

²⁵ Longenecker, 118.

and as such it is clear to the understanding.²⁶ Paul's clear understanding came from the prophets. He quoted Habakkuk who wrote, "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith (Ha 2:4, NASB95). Those who are righteous in God's sight are those who live by faith. Correlating this passage to 2:20, it is seen that the righteous man allows Jesus to live through him while absolutely trusting Jesus.

Righteous comes by faith, but faith cannot come by the law. Paul asserted that living by law is not the same as living by faith; in fact, they "are mutually exclusive as bases for righteousness."²⁷

The law is not about faith; it's about doing and working. In verse 12 Paul quoted from Lv 18.5, which says, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord" (NASB95). So the one who has done them, the works of the law, will live because of them. If a person could completely obey the law, things would be fine, but Paul had already established in 2:10 that this was not possible. And on at least two occasions, Jesus expounded upon the comprehensiveness of God's standard (and thus the impossibility of keeping it). To the lawyer who wanted to know who was his neighbor, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, effectively saying, "You must love everyone you encounter." In the Sermon on the Mount, he said actions are more than external (e.g., you can't murder); they are also internal (e.g., you can't even hate). The standard is impossibly high, and the penalty for failure is severe. Dt 27:26 says, "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (NASB); Lv 18:29 says, "Any person who does any of these abominations must be cut off from his people" (HCSB).

So Paul has made two arguments against trying to be righteous by obeying the law. One, righteousness cannot come by obeying the law, because one must obey all the law. Two, righteousness only comes by faith. But if righteousness only comes by faith, in what should they have placed their faith?

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

13 Christ redeemed **us** from the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf, because it has been written, "Cursed is everyone hanging upon a cross,"

They should have placed their faith in Christ, the one who redeemed us. At its core, redeemed (ἐξηγόρασεν) means to secure deliverance of,²⁸ but the word has a commercial overtone, and so it also means "to cause the release or freedom of someone

²⁶ Arndt, 222.

²⁷ Longenecker, 120.

²⁸ Arndt, 343.

by a means which proves costly to the individual causing the release.”²⁹ The imagery here is that of the *agora*, the Greek marketplace, where people were auctioned off;³⁰ God bought our freedom. Obviously this word was used figuratively in this verse; God didn’t literally pay money to anyone (though some later believed just that³¹). The same word is used in 1 Co 6:20, “For you have been *bought* with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (NASB95). The price that God paid was the death of his own Son.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by coming a curse on our behalf. It was difficult for Jewish people to understand how the Christ, the Messiah, could be the one who was cursed, the recipient of God’s condemnation; logically these are not compatible. The key to understanding this verse is the exchange: Christ took the curse from those who have faith and put it on himself. He became a curse on our behalf, not because he deserved it, but because we deserved it but couldn’t help ourselves. This is formally known as penal substitutionary atonement. As MacArthur points out, these words “on my behalf” are some of the most beautiful words in the Bible.³²

How did the death of Christ make him cursed? It has been written, “Cursed is everyone hanging upon a cross.” This a quote from the second giving of the law, “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance” (Dt 21:22-23, NASB95). Paul’s quote is from the parenthetical part. Being publicly hung on a tree, the final stage of Jewish capital punishment after the condemned had already been executed, was not the curse itself, but rather the proof of God’s curse.³³ At the time Deuteronomy was written, there was, of course, no concept of a crucifixion. By Paul’s day, however, this Roman practice was well known, and the Jews had extended the concept of Dt 21:22-23 to include hanging on a cross.³⁴ Thus, since Jesus died on a cross, he was “obviously” cursed, the subject of divine judgment.³⁵

14 ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.

14 so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Paul brought this paragraph to a conclusion by means of two purpose clauses; both

²⁹ Louw, 1:487.

³⁰ George, 237-238.

³¹ “A literal translation may also lead to the mistaken interpretation, which was widespread in the Middle Ages, that in redeeming the believers God actually paid a price to the Devil” (Louw, 1:487).

³² MacArthur, 79.

³³ George, 238-239.

³⁴ Longenecker, 122.

³⁵ Zodhiates, G2671.

related back to everything covered so far in the chapter.

The first purpose clause says that Christ redeemed so that the blessing of Abraham could be extended to the nations, the Gentiles. Abraham was righteous by faith (3:6); his “sons” are those who are righteous by faith (3:7). God promised Abraham to bless all nations through him (3:8-9), and the blessing is that anyone who believes like Abraham believed is declared righteous because of their belief, their faith. Works are not required.

The second purpose clause says that Christ redeemed so that anyone with faith could receive his Spirit. Not only were Jews and Gentiles able to be declared righteous by faith, but redemption also gave them the Holy Spirit.³⁶

What impact should this paragraph have had on the Galatians? Although Paul had not yet specifically applied this paragraph to them—he didn’t do that until 3:26—they should have realized that the blessing and the promise of the Holy Spirit both come by faith. They already had the Holy Spirit, which they had received by faith (3:2-5), so they had already received the blessing and the promise. They had it all! The Galatians should not have missed Paul’s conclusion that the Mosaic law had nothing further to offer them.

15 Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω· ὅμως ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται.

15 Brothers, let me give a human example: No one invalidates or adds to a man’s last will and testament after it has been validated.

Verse 15 begins with a term of address, brothers, which signifies a new thought; thus this is a new a paragraph, wherein Paul continued to argue from Scripture that salvation is by faith alone.

Paul set up the first part of his argument by giving a human example (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον); that is, he used a common, ordinary, everyday sort of example, not something spiritual or heavenly. Paul’s example was this: Once a last will and testament³⁷ has been validated, it cannot be invalidated or added to. This example is full of legal terms. To validate (κεκυρωμένην) means to invest something with power or put it into force;³⁸ once the proper legal rules have been obeyed, the will has been put into force and now has authority. To invalidate (ἀθετεῖ) means “to refuse to recognize the validity of something.”³⁹ To add to (ἐπιδιατάσσεται) has the idea of supplementary

³⁶ See also 4:6.

³⁷ Although the word διαθήκην meant last will and testament in Greek thought, Longnecker notes it was often used as the translation for covenant in the LXX (128). So it’s possible that Paul had both a will (humanly speaking) and a covenant (spiritually speaking) in mind as he wrote this; 3:17 does refer to a covenant.

³⁸ Louw, 1:681.

³⁹ Swanson, DBLG 119.

or modifying instructions; this is the technical term for adding a codicil to a will.⁴⁰

16 τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

16 Now the promises were spoken to **Abraham** and to his descendant. He does not say “and to descendants,” referring to many, but “and to your descendant” referring to one, who is Christ.

Paul set up the second part of his argument using Abraham. The promises were spoken to Abraham, which Paul had referred to in 3:8, “The Scripture...preached the gospel in advance to Abraham *saying*, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you’,” and in 3:13-14, “Christ redeemed us...so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant, where descendant refers to one person, not many. God made many promises to Abraham, but it is likely that Paul was quoting from Ge 22:16-18:

“By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (NASB95).

How will all the nations be blessed? All nations shall be blessed in “your seed.” On the one hand seed is a singular noun; on the other hand Hebrew grammar allows for seed to be the generic singular,⁴¹ and thus refer to a plurality. So Abraham’s seed could refer to one descendant of Abraham or all the descendants of Abraham. Paul argued that seed was intentionally singular, and believing in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this is the correction interpretation. The promise of international blessing spoken to Abraham was Christ; those who trust him participate in that blessing and receive the Holy Spirit.

17 τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονώς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.

17 This is what I’m saying: The law, which came to exist 430 years later, did not invalidate **the covenant, which had been validated previously by God**, resulting in the invalidation of the promise.

Having set up his argument in the last two verses, Paul made his point. He overlaid God’s covenant with Abraham on top of the example of a last will and testament.

⁴⁰ Arndt, 370.

⁴¹ See Ge 3:15 for an example where “seed” is clearly singular.

Remember from the interpretation in 3:6 that Jewish writings in Paul's time generally regarded Abraham as being righteous because he obeyed the Mosaic law, even though the Mosaic law had not yet been given. A good example was Abraham's circumcision. Contra to these writings, Paul had already argued in 3:6 that Abraham was righteous *only* because he had faith, and he made a similar argument here in 3:17.

The law did not invalidate the covenant, resulting in the invalidation of the promise. People do not invalidate a last will and testament; they don't add anything to it once it is validated and the person is dead. Similarly, God did not attempt to invalidate his own covenant to Abraham by trying to add the requirements of the Mosaic law to it.

Abraham received God's promise *only* because God had promised it to him; the coming of the Mosaic law neither added to nor subtracted from the promise.

18 εἰ γὰρ ἐκ νόμου ἡ κληρονομία, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας· τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ δι' ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ θεός.

18 For if the inheritance is by law, then it is not by promise; God has graciously given it to Abraham through the promise.

"For" (γὰρ) is a marker of reason, thus verse 18 explains why verse 17 is true. The coming of the Mosaic law neither added to nor subtracted from the promise God gave to Abraham because Abraham's inheritance was given by promise not law. Law and promise are fundamentally unrelated. "When speaking of acceptance before God and the reception of God's benefits, Paul insists that law and promise must be kept separate, for they operate on entirely different planes."⁴²

A last will and testament specifies what should be done with an inheritance (κληρονομία). God promised land to Abraham's descendants, but he also promised salvation through Abraham's one descendant, Christ (3:14). This promise was not given because Abraham had been good and obeyed the Mosaic law but because God was gracious and made a covenant, thus it is something that cannot be worked for. Justification and sanctification are not about works but God's grace; grace has always been God's plan and always will be.⁴³

This last paragraph (3:15-18) can be summarized with one climatic point: Faith and works are unrelated in the sphere of receiving God's promised blessing and the Holy Spirit. And the first two sections of the chapter (3:1-18) can be summarized like this: When the Galatians trusted God, he credited them with righteousness and gave them the Spirit; the Mosaic law could not contribute anything. Paul had disarmed the Judaizers' claims that obeying the law was required.

⁴² Longenecker, 134.

⁴³ "Has graciously given" is in the perfect tense.

Structural Diagram

(people of faith are blessed together with Abraham 3:9)

So

| as many as are *righteous* by works of law
they are under a curse

for

it has been written

Cursed *is* everyone

who is not continuing in everything

And

no one has been declared righteous **in the law** in the sight of God
because

The righteous will live by faith

and

the law is not of faith

but

the one who has done them will live because of them

Christ redeemed **us** from the curse of the law
having become a curse on our behalf

so that

the blessing of Abraham might come **to the nations** in Christ Jesus

so that

we might receive **the promise of the Spirit** through faith.

No one invalidates or adds to a man's last will and testament

Now

the promises were spoken **to Abraham** and to his descendant.

He does not say and to descendants referring to many

but

and to your descendant referring to one, who is Christ.

The law did not invalidate **the covenant**

resulting in the invalidation of the promise

For

if the inheritance *is* by law

then *it is* not by promise

God has graciously given *it* **to Abraham through the promise.**

Tracing the Argument

External – Having argued in the previous section that the only way to be declared righteous in God's sight was through faith in Jesus alone, Paul responded to the claims of the Judaizers that obedience to the Mosaic law was also required.

Internal – Paul gave two negative argument against the Mosaic law. First, as the law requires absolute obedience, it curses those who seek righteousness through it; thus the blessing promised to Abraham cannot be received through the law. Second, the law did not invalidate God's covenant with Abraham, thus it had no impact on God's promise to Abraham.

Textual Outline

1. The law cursed those who tried to earn righteousness (3:10-14).
2. The law did not invalidate God's promise to Abraham (3:15-18).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 3:10-19 in order to demonstrate the limitations of the law.

Teaching Outline

God's people cannot earn righteousness through obedience, and today I want you to stop trying to earn righteousness through obedience. From our text in Galatians 3, we are going to see 2 reasons why you cannot earn righteousness through obedience.

1. Stop trying to earn righteousness through obedience (3:10-14).
2. Stop trying to earn what God gives by grace (3:15-18).

Galatians 3:19-25

Limits of the Text

In the previous section (3:10-18), Paul explained what that the law was *not* good for. In this section, he explained what the law was good for.

Translation

19 Then why *was* the law *given*? It was added **for the sake of transgressions**, until the time when the descendant might come to whom he had been promised, arranged through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 And the mediator is not for one *party alone*, but God is one. 21 Therefore *is* the law in opposition to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law was given which is able to give life, *then* righteousness would certainly have been **by law**; 22 **but** the Scripture imprisoned everyone under sin, so the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who are trusting. 23 And before the coming of faith we were being guarded under law, being imprisoned with respect to the faith about to be revealed, 24 so that the law became our child-guardian until Christ, so that we might be declared righteous by faith; 25 but now that faith has come, we are **no longer under the child-guardian**.

Interpretation

Paul had just finished demonstrating that God imputes righteousness and graciously gives the Holy Spirit apart from the law. If this is true, why did God bother to give the law? A key point to understanding this passage, especially in relation to other passages on the law, is that Paul was not dealing with all possible uses of the law but confined himself to its relationship to redemption.⁴⁴

19 Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται, διαταγείς δι' ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου.

19 Then why *was* the law *given*? It was added **for the sake of transgressions**, until the time when the descendant might come to whom he had been promised, arranged through angels by the hand of a mediator.

This is the first of two questions that Paul raised and answered to explain how the Mosaic law was still useful. He asked, “Why was the law given?” What was the purpose for the law? Or more specifically, what was the function of the law in the history of salvation? If it has nothing to do with securing righteousness, blessing, promise, the Holy Spirit, or God’s grace (3:1-18), what place does it have in God’s redemptive plan?

⁴⁴ George, 251.

The law was added for the sake of transgressions (*παράβασεων*). To transgress means “to act contrary to established custom or law, with the implication of intent.”⁴⁵ The law increased Israel’s understanding of sin; it “was given to bring about a consciousness of sin in sin-hardened humanity.”⁴⁶ Paul would later write more about the law in his letter to the Romans, “No flesh will be justified in His sight by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Ro 3:20, HCSB), and, “The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more” (Ro 5:20, HCSB).

Though the Mosaic law is no longer a binding covenant, it can still serve this same purpose today. “The covenant of law is long past, but the moral demands of the law have not diminished, having neither begun nor ended with the Mosaic covenant. That is why preaching the moral, ethical standards of the law today is still imperative in driving men to Christ. Unless men realize they are living in violation of God’s law and therefore stand under His divine judgment, they will see no reason to be saved. Grace is meaningless to a person who feels no inadequacy or need of help.”⁴⁷

The law was added until the time when the descendant might come. The law had a temporal limitation; its goal was achieved and its value ended when the descendant, Christ (3:16), came to whom he had been promised, Abraham.

The adding of the law was arranged by angels. There is no mention of angels in the Exodus account of the giving of the law. It only says that “Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the LORD came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently” (Ex 19:18, HCSB). But near the end of his life, Moses wrote, “The LORD came from Sinai and appeared to them from Seir; He shone on them from Mount Paran and came with ten thousand holy ones, with lightning from His right hand for them” (Dt 33:2, HCSB). “Ten thousand holy ones” is an expression that is somewhat difficult to translate; more literally it would be “myriads of holiness.” A somewhat similar poetic reference is given in Psalms: “The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness” (Ps 68:17, NASB95). From these passages, rabbinic thought developed the idea that angels were not only present during the giving of the law at Sinai, but they played a role in mediating it.⁴⁸ And a few passages in the New Testament verify this idea (Ac 7:38, 53; Hb 2:2), mentioning angels in reference to the giving of the law.

Why did Paul bring up angels at all? Longenecker suggests that the Judaizers were emphasizing the magnificence of the entire law-giving occasion at Sinai. You can

⁴⁵ Louw, 1:468.

⁴⁶ Longenecker, 138.

⁴⁷ MacArthur, 87.

⁴⁸ Longenecker, 139-140.

almost hear them, “There were thousands upon thousand of angels riding about in fiery chariots!” So Paul allowed for their presence, but then turned the argument against them in 3:20.

The law was added by the hand of a mediator. A mediator (μεσίτου) is “one who causes or helps parties to come to an agreement, with the implication of guaranteeing the certainty of the arrangement.”⁴⁹ Who was this mediator that gave the law to Israel? Moses’ explanation of the events at Sinai is helpful:

“All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it they trembled and stood at a distance. ‘You speak to us, and we will listen,’ they said to Moses, ‘but don’t let God speak to us, or we will die.’ Moses responded to the people, ‘Don’t be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear Him and will not sin.’ And the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.” (Ex 20:18-21, HCSB)

The Israelites were scared of God, so Moses mediated on their behalf.⁵⁰ God gave the law to the Israelites through two mediators, angels (acting on God’s behalf) and Moses (acting on Israel’s behalf):

God > angels > the law > Moses > the Israelites

20 ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἔστιν.

20 *And the mediator is not for one party alone, but God is one.*

This sentence is obscure, but the idea is probably pretty simple. Speaking in general terms, if a mediator is involved, there two parties. The mediator helps them come to some agreement, though there will likely be compromises to make both sides happy.

The giving of the law required two mediators, but the giving of the promise to Abraham required none.

“The LORD said to Abram: ‘Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” (Ge 12:1-3, HCSB)

There were no angels, no thunder and lightning, and most importantly no mediating required. It was just God making a unilateral promise to Abraham.

Paul’s point was this: Having a mediator is an inferior method of interacting, thus the law was inferior to the promise. Thus Paul turned the angels-were-present-at-Sinai

⁴⁹ Louw, 1:367.

⁵⁰ As he did on other occasions (Ex 4:15, 16; 19:3-8).

argument against the Judaizers.

21 ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν [τοῦ θεοῦ]; μὴ γένοιτο. εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη.

21 Therefore *is* the law in opposition to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law was given which is able to give life, *then* righteousness would certainly have been **by law**;

This is the second of two questions that Paul raised on the usefulness of the law. Is the Mosaic law actually in opposition to the Abrahamic covenant? Absolutely not! Paul unequivocally stated that they could not be in opposition.

Paul set up an impossible situation for the sake of argument:⁵¹ Let's suppose that God gave a law, a set of rules to obey, and it could give spiritual life. What would that mean? It would mean people could be righteous by obeying the law. If this were possible, then the law would be in opposition to the promise! It would have provided a conflicting way of salvation.⁵² But as this is an impossible situation (2:16), the law does not contradict the promise. It was never God's plan to make people righteous by means of the law.

22 ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

22 **but** the Scripture imprisoned everyone under sin, so the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who are trusting.

In (strong) contrast to the false conclusion that law brings righteousness, the true conclusion is that the law brings sin. The Scripture imprisoned everyone under sin; God, by giving the Old Testament, imprisoned everyone. The Jews had a tendency to think of Scripture as a tall fence, protecting them from the impurities of the people around them.⁵³ But Paul said it was like a barb-wired fence at a penitentiary, confining and condemning them. It made everyone—humanity in general, not just the Jews—aware of their sin (3:19), and it also prevented anyone from escaping from the penalty of being a sinner.

When the law brought sin, it pointed people to the promise and showed them their need for a Savior. The second half of this verse is a purpose clause. Why did the Scripture imprison everyone under sin? It imprisoned them to point people to the promise. Like Abraham, those who trust in God's promises receive God's righteousness. And God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus.

The law had a purpose, and it worked in harmony with the promise to Abraham

⁵¹ This is a second-class condition, a contrary-to-fact assumption for the sake of argument.

⁵² MacArthur, 88.

⁵³ George, 262-263.

concerning Jesus. “Thus we cannot move from Abraham to Christ, from promise to fulfillment, without going through the law after all.”⁵⁴

23 Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι,

23 And before the coming of faith we were being guarded under law, being imprisoned with respect to the faith about to be revealed,

Having answered two questions that regarding the purpose of the law, Paul brought the entire issue—the issue of trying to add obedience to the Mosaic law to faith in Christ—to a climax in this final sentence (3:23-25).

Before the coming of faith, the Jews were being guarded under the law. “The coming of faith” is a reference to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In general, the law served a purpose for everyone: It made them aware of their sin (3:22). In particular, the law served a purpose for the Jews:⁵⁵ It guarded them. Being guarded (ἐφρουρούμεθα) is prison terminology, describing the keeping of prisoners in a holding cell until the disposition of their cases.⁵⁶ The law forcefully reminded the Jews that there was no escape or freedom by trying to do good works. “Because [the law’s] demands were so impossible, the spiritually-minded, conscientious Jew who sought to love God and serve Him was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and inadequacy. He sincerely wanted to obey the whole law but knew he could not.”⁵⁷

The result of being guarded is that the Jews were imprisoned (συγκλειόμενοι)⁵⁸ with respect to the faith about to be revealed. They were prevented from knowing and trusting in Jesus until God allowed them to, until he revealed his plan for faith in Jesus.

24 ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν·

24 so that the law became our child-guardian until Christ, so that we might be declared righteous by faith;

Why were the Jews guarded under the law? They were guarded because they needed a child-guardian. Plato said:

“And of all wild creatures, the child is most intractable; for insofar as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly and most insolent creature. Wherefore the child must be strapped up, as it were, with many bridles—first,

⁵⁴ George, 264.

⁵⁵ The “we” in this verse is the Jewish nation.

⁵⁶ Arndt, 1067.

⁵⁷ MacArthur, 94.

⁵⁸ Same word used in 3:22.

when he leaves the care of nurse and mother, with παιδαγωγός to guide his childish ignorance.”⁵⁹

The law was their child-guardian (παιδαγωγός). This word is literally “boy-leader” (παῖς + ἄγω). It referred to a man, usually a slave, whose duty it was to conduct a boy or youth to and from school and to superintend his conduct.⁶⁰ He was not a school teacher,⁶¹ despite the present meaning of the derivative “pedagogue,” but was a custodian and a disciplinarian.⁶² He also instructed him in the basics of good manners.⁶³ When the young man became of age, the παιδαγωγός was no longer needed.⁶⁴

As a child-guardian guided and led a child to maturity, so the law guided and led Israel to righteousness through faith in Jesus.

This metaphoric description teaches four things about the law. One, it was a tool for supervising and disciplining the conduct of Israel. Two, it was temporary in nature, lasting until Christ came. Three, it was inferior to faith. And four, it led Israel to recognize their need for faith, formerly in God, presently in Christ.

25 ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἔσμεν.

25 but now that faith has come, we are no longer under the child-guardian.

And now that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus had taken place, they no longer needed to be child-guarded by the law! Living by the laws of Judaism was now optional for them, and (as verse 26 will show) if it was optional for Jews, it was certainly not required for Gentiles.

To summarize Paul’s point (3:23-25): The purpose of the law for the Jews was to force them to realize they were hopelessly sinful and unable to be righteous through good works, thus they needed something to constrain their sinful tendencies (the law) and a way to be made righteous (faith in Jesus). Now that Christ has come, the law had served its purpose, at least as it related to redemptive history.

⁵⁹ Longenecker, 146-147.

⁶⁰ Arndt, 748.

⁶¹ Thus “tutor” (NASB, NKJV) and “schoolmaster” (KJV) are misleading translations.

⁶² Longenecker, 146.

⁶³ George, 265.

⁶⁴ Arndt, 748.

Structural Diagram

Then why was the law given?

It was added **for the sake of transgressions,**

And
the mediator is not for one party alone,
but
God is one.

Therefore
is the law in opposition to the promises of God?
May it never be!

For
if a law was given which is able to give life,
then righteousness would certainly have been **by law**
but
the Scripture imprisoned everyone under sin,

so
the promise might be given to those who are trusting in Jesus

And
before the coming of faith
we were being guarded under law,
so that
the law became our child-guardian until Christ,
so that
we might be declared righteous by faith;
but
now that faith has come,
we are **no longer under the child-guardian.**

Tracing the Argument

External – Having explained what the law was not good for (3:10-18), Paul then explained what it was good for.

Internal – Paul raised and answered two questions regarding the law. Why was the law given? The law was given for the sake of transgressions. Did the law oppose the promise? The law did not oppose God's promise to Abraham. Paul then finished the section (3:1-25) by concluding that the law was intended to guide the Jews to Christ.

Textual Outline

1. The law revealed everyone's transgressions (3:19-22).
2. The law child-guided the Jews to Christ (3:23-25).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 3:19-25 in order to explain to the Galatian churches the redemptive purposes of the law.

Teaching Outline

Although we are not bound to the Mosaic covenant, the Mosaic law still has a purpose. Today I want you to understand the redemptive purposes of the law. From this text in

Galatians, we are going to see 2 redemptive purposes for the law.

1. Understand that the law reveals the transgressions of men (3:19-22).
2. Understand that the law leads people to Jesus (3:23-25).

Galatians 3:26-29

Galatians 3:26-29 is part of the next section, Galatians 3:26-4:11, and thus is covered with chapter 4.

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