**CHRIST, THE LAW AND THE CURSE**

***7Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 9So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.***

***10All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” 11Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because “The righteous will live by faith.”******12The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The person who does these things will live by them.” 13Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” 14******He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.***

**Galatians 3:7-14 (NIV)**

Having concluded the question from 3:5 (‘*Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?’*) by citing Genesis 15:6 (‘*Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”’*), Paul now draws the inference: ‘*Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham’* (3:7) or more literally: ‘Know/understand that those who are based on faith, these are the sons (children) of Abraham.’ Paul uses the word for ‘sons’ rather than the more general word for ‘children’ (as in Romans 8:16-21) in anticipation of paralleling our sonship in relation to Christ’s (4:4-7).

What follows will spell out the implications of these two truths: the Galatians experienced the Spirit on the basis of their faith, and, Abraham was reckoned righteous on the basis of faith.

‘*Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”’* (3:8). When Paul writes: ‘*Scripture foresaw …’* he is using a normal Hebraic form of speech. ‘*Scripture foresaw’* is the equivalent of ‘God foresaw.’ Paul will now show how the Gentiles are included with those who are Abraham’s true children. What was the ‘blessing’ and how would the nations come to inherit it? In 3:8 the Gentiles’ ‘blessing’ is equated with justification. Through Abraham the nations would be blessed = ‘*God would justify the Gentiles*.’ This was the good news - the gospel promised to Abraham. How this blessing would be inherited was by faith (‘*God would justify the Gentiles by faith’*). This was the only way Gentiles could inherit Abraham’s blessing because Abraham was the father of the Jewish race. The agitators were almost certainly telling the Galatian converts that they had to become sons of Abraham by circumcision to inherit God’s promised blessing through Abraham. Paul’s counter was that the Galatians were already sons of Abraham, not by circumcision but by faith. In one sense Christians can’t speak of the gospel being preached before Calvary. In another sense, here is an anticipation of the gospel.

‘*So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith’* (3:9). Abraham was declared in right-standing with God (righteous) when he placed his faith in God’s promise (Genesis 15:6). This preceded his circumcision (Genesis 17) by a number of years. Likewise, the promise that through Abraham blessing would come to the Gentiles (first promised in Genesis 12:3) preceded his circumcision (or any other act equated with keeping the Law) by an even greater time. The promise of right-standing with God is equated with Abraham’s blessing. In 3:8 the promise that through Abraham the nations would be blessed = ‘*God would justify the Gentiles*.’ Abraham’s right-standing with God was secured by his faith. The blessing promised through Abraham (= ‘*God would justify the Gentiles*’) is equally secured by faith. ‘*So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith’* (3:9).

*‘For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law”’*(3:10). Paul now presents the logical opposite of what he has just argued on the basis of Abraham’s faith – what it means for the Galatians if they submit to the Law. *‘For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse’* stands in contrast to 3:9 in two ways (1) following 2:16, living on the basis of ‘the hearing of faith’ (3:9) is contrasted with living on the basis of ‘works of law’ = doing the law (3:10) and (2) the ‘blessing’ that rests on those who have faith (3:9) is contrasted with the ‘curse’ that rests on those who go the way of ‘doing the law’ (3:10). Paul moves from the blessing of Abraham in Genesis (3:7-9) to the curses of Deuteronomy 27 and 28 on those who do not obey the Law (3:10-13). He does this by citing the final, summarising curse in Deuteronomy 27:26 as it appears in the Septuagint but with some modification from 29:19,20 (‘all the things written in the book’): *‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’* (3:10).

Paul’s point is that those who choose to live by the Law thereby exclude themselves from the blessing, because they must now “*continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law”* and they are cursed if they don’t. Paul is showing the utter incompatibility of living on the basis of faith while at the same time trying to live on the basis of the Law. If the Galatians allowed themselves to be circumcised, they would be making a choice to live by the Law; and because people must ‘*continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’* they thereby exclude themselves from living by the Spirit, based on faith in Christ. These two ways of living were mutually exclusive. One either lives by faith or by the Law, and to choose to liver by the Law, even partially, is to live under a curse. They cannot be partial in their obedience: to choose to live by the Law means of necessity to live by the whole Law. Partial obedience (just circumcision, food laws and sabbath observance) is not permissible under the Law itself. It is either no Law or all Law.

Choosing the Law means choosing to ‘live’ by the Law which automatically means one is not trusting Christ for salvation. The logical consequence of all this is that the one who chooses to live by the Law is thereby excluded from Christ and so cut off from salvation altogether. Paul’s Gentile converts in Galatia cannot pick and choose what they will obey from the Law. To go the way of Torah is to go the whole way. There is no provision for partial obedience.

*‘Clearly no one is* *justified before God by the law, because* *“The righteous will live by faith.”**12The law is not based on faith; on the contrary,* *“The person who does these things will live by them”’*(3:11,12). These two verses are better kept together because Paul now spells out on the basis of scripture that these two ways of living – by faith or by doing law – are mutually exclusive. He first repeats the point already made in the preceding paragraph, that ‘justification/righteousness’ has nothing to do with the Law. It only comes on the basis of faith (as it did with Abraham [3:7-9]) – now of course meaning faith in Christ - but all of life must be lived on the same basis. Paul’s concern now is not with how one begins the Christian faith, but how one lives it out. We live it out the same way we came into it – ‘by faith’ (in Christ). Citing Habakkuk 2:4, *“The righteous will live by faith.”*

Being ‘*justified before God by the law’* is not referring to how one enters the newly formed people of God, but with how this ‘righteousness’ before God is maintained. What must one do to be pleasing to God? Paul is adamant that they do not have to add ‘works of law’ to faith to be brought to completion.

Paul now cites Leviticus 18:5 ‘*“The person who does these things will live by them* (or: in them).”*’* The verb (*live*) does not mean ‘come to life.’ It means ‘to live in an ongoing way’ and the preposition (*by*) is not a form of agency ( = by means of) but is locative ( = the sphere in which one must live). This is the curse. The one who ‘does the law’ is condemned not only to doing the whole Law, but must live altogether within the context of doing Torah. This automatically excludes living by faith.

Paul’s point is: the Galatians cannot have it both ways. It is an either/or situation. One either comes to life, and continues to live, on the basis of faith, or one is condemned to living by the Law and by the Law alone.

*‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”’*(3:13). Paul now picks up the language of ‘curse.’ On this side of the cross and the gift of the Spirit, the ‘*curse of the law’* has to do with the necessity of living under the Law and so of being excluded from living by faith (where righteousness alone is found). What Christ has done is to deliver us from this ‘curse of the law,’ this necessity of living by law at all, and especially living by law alone with the companion necessity of living the whole Law. This is what he accuses the agitators of not doing in 6:13. It needs to be noted that Paul is not saying the curse rests on us because we are incapable of living out the Law. Inability is not the issue but rather the ‘necessity’ is the issue, the adding of law to faith in Christ that Paul argues against.

Christ did this ‘*by becoming a curse for us,’* in our place, on our behalf. But before Paul goes on (3:14) to explain the ultimate two-fold purpose of Christ’s becoming a curse for us, he offers biblical grounds for what he has just said. Standing at the head of a series of ‘random laws’ as it does, Deuteronomy 21:23 concludes a passage that begins in verse 22 regarding what Israel is to do with people guilty of a capital crime. He is to be ‘*put to death and his body is hung on a tree.’* The curse comes in the next verse, which has to do with burial on the same day, because ‘*anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse’* (Deuteronomy 21:23). Christ, who was crucified on the alleged crime of insurrection, through His death became ‘*a curse for us*.’ The curse here is no longer for a capital crime; rather, Christ took on Himself the curse of anyone (especially Gentiles) having to ‘do law’ so that, as Paul will go on to conclude in 3:14, they might receive the blessing of Abraham.

‘*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit’* (3:14). Paul does three things in this verse. First, he concludes 3:13, offering the two-fold aim of Christ’s having become a curse for us: that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, and that we (he and the Gentile Galatians together) might receive the promise of the Spirit. Secondly, he concludes the entire section that began in 3:1, and thirdly, he concludes the present paragraph, whose passion has been that ‘justification’ is not based on works of law in any way, because that means having to live under the curse of having to do the entire law and apart from grace and faith.

The first purpose of Christ’s becoming a curse for us (3:13) is seen by a more literal rendering of Paul’s wording: ‘in order that unto the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham might come in Christ Jesus.’ What has come to the Gentiles through Christ is the promised ‘blessing of Abraham.’ Christ’s taking the *‘curse of the law’* on Himself in His crucifixion eliminates altogether the need for Gentiles to observe any aspect of Torah. All of this happened ‘*through Christ Jesus*.’ God Himself fulfilled the promise to Abraham in and through the work of Christ’s death on the cross.

The second purpose is again brought out by Paul’s literal wording: ‘in order that the promise of the Spirit we might receive through faith.’ He is including himself and other Jews in the receiving of the Spirit by faith’ and not just the Galatian believers. He uses the term: ‘*the promise of the Spirit*.’ When Paul first came to the Galatians, he had spoken of the Spirit in terms of His fulfilling the long-awaited coming day of Yahweh, when God’s Spirit would Himself rest on and indwell His people, including the Gentiles. This is especially relevant in the present context because the promise of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36 and 37 (where Ezekiel has reworked the promised new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34) involves the Spirit’s ‘fulfilling’ the Law by writing it on people’s hearts. The Galatians common reception of the Spirit has in effect brought Torah observance to an end, because the aim of the Law is now written on the heart and so fulfilled through the gift of the Spirit.

With these concluding clauses, Paul has firstly, appealed to their reception of the Spirit at the beginning of their life in Christ, that it was an experienced reality that came to them quite apart from the Law. Secondly, taking up the arguments of the agitators themselves, he has shown that there is a better way to read the story of Abraham with its promise of Gentile inclusion, which has nothing to do with their being circumcised in order to belong to the newly formed people of God. All of this happened through the death of Christ who redeemed them so that the blessing of Abraham and the gift of the Spirit might be theirs in Christ and so quite apart from the Law.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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