

# EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITION OF GALATIANS 3.1-14

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A Paper

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By

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## Introduction

In the following paper we will examine the text of Galatians 3.1-14 (which has been provided here along with a translation). First, we will begin by exegeting the text while adding some expository comments. Second, we will attempt to portray how this text contributes to Pauline Pneumatology.

## Translation

<sup>1</sup> ὦ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος;

O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publically portrayed as having been crucified?

<sup>2</sup> τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; This *is* the only thing I wish to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit from works of law or from hearing of faith?

<sup>3</sup> οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἐστε, ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελείσθε;

Are you so foolish? Having begun in Spirit now you are finishing in flesh?

<sup>4</sup> τσαῦτα ἐπάθετε εἰκῆ; εἶ γε καὶ εἰκῆ.

Did you suffer so many things to no avail? If indeed *it was* also to no avail.

<sup>5</sup> ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;

Therefore, is the one supplying you with the Spirit and working power-acts among you *doing so* from works of law or from hearing of faith?

<sup>6</sup> Καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην·

Just as Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,

<sup>7</sup> γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ.

therefore you know that the ones from faith these are sons of Abraham.

<sup>8</sup> προῖδουσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προευηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη·

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith

<sup>9</sup> ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ.

So that the ones by faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

For as many as are by works of law, they are under a curse, for it has been written that “Cursed is each one who does not continue in each of the things having been written in the Book of the Law, to do them”.

<sup>11</sup> ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιούται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται·

And that no one in law is justified from God *is* clearly evident, that the righteous one from faith will live,

<sup>12</sup> ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.

but the Law is not by faith, but the doer of them he will live by them.

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

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law becoming under our curse because it is written,

“Under a curse is each of one hanging upon a tree”

<sup>14</sup> ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.

that unto the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham may come in Christ Jesus that we may receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

## **Exegesis and Exposition**

The Apostle Paul has just finished a story about a confrontation that he had with the Apostle Peter at Antioch (2.11-21). Peter had been openly fellowshiping with Gentile Christians as if he himself were a Gentile. When Jews came from Jerusalem Peter suddenly disowned his Gentile brothers and sisters by resuming a separatist stance against them. Paul understood this to be a rejection of the Gentiles (although it could be assumed that Peter understood himself to be allowing for the Gentiles to be considered Christians, although a lower class of Christians than Jewish Christians). For Paul it was not possible to claim that Jews and Gentiles were equally made righteous before God if one had to behave like a Jew to either (1) be a Christian at all or (2) be of the class of Christians that included Peter and the Jerusalem Jews. For Paul it was important to realize that justification by faith meant that observing the Law had nothing to do with one's status before God and therefore the law was irrelevant for determining one's status in the community.

The Apostle argued that attempting to approach God by means of law was the equivalent to nullifying the grace of God. Those who came before God did so on the basis that they were "crucified with Christ" which is a loaded concept in and of itself that means, at least, that Christians participate in fellowship with God by means of being united to Christ who satisfied God by means of the cross. As Paul would not allow Peter to behave in such a manner that this message would be skewed neither would he allow for his Galatian converts to be tricked into behaving like Jews perpetuating the misconception that adherence to law has something to do with our status before God.

Therefore, Paul lambasts the Gentiles for being "bewitched" by someone. There was no reason for being fooled into believing that law had anything to do with their new found religion.

When Paul had preached to them, he had made the message of the crucifixion of Christ most evident, because he had “publically proclaimed” Christ as the crucified one.<sup>1</sup> It seems to have been a primary aspect of his message (3.1).

The Apostle moves toward deductive logic rhetorically asking the Galatians if the reception of the Spirit occurred when they were doing works of law or if it occurred at the hearing of faith. It is safe to assume that Paul expected some sort of life transforming event to have accompanied their reception of the Spirit for he is confident that he could remind them that it had surely occurred before there had been any opportunity for them to begin observing the Law.<sup>2</sup> There is no hint that the Galatians would have been able to challenge Paul on this assumption (v. 2).

The Apostle continues his “if A, then B” argument since he is confident that the Galatians would affirm that the Holy Spirit came when they believed what he had preached about Christ the crucified. The second part of the argument is that there is no reason to assume that “beginning in Spirit” must be “completed by flesh”. The Spirit came at faith. The Spirit came independent of any law observance. Therefore, it should be obvious that the presence of the Holy

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1 There are many opinions regarding the meaning of προεγράφη in v.1. Some have suggested that it may refer to Paul preaching Christ from what was “previously written”, i.e. the OT. Others such as David Balch in his article “The Suffering of Isis/Io and Paul’s Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal 3:1): Frescoes in Pompeian and Roman Houses and in the Temple of Isis” in *Pompeii in Roman Domestic Art and Early House Churches* (WUNT 228): 84-108, suggest that Paul used preexistent art dedicated to pagan deities to teach the story of Christ being crucified. Most understand it to refer exegetically to the content of Paul’s preaching (Christ crucified = the content preached), e.g. J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 209, 235 and B.W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God*, 154. Others like Gordon Fee in *God’s Empowering Presence*, 382, and Tom Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 99, understand this to be referring back to 2.20 where he referred to himself as being crucified with Christ. Therefore, the “public portrayal” was his own ministry.

2 This argument echoes Acts 10.34-48 where the Apostle Peter recognized that the Holy Spirit had chosen to dwell inside of the Gentiles *in spite* of the fact that there had been absolutely no evidence of full conversion to Judaism by Cornelius and his household. In fact, this is the argument that Peter himself uses at the Jerusalem Council to persuade the others that God has already welcomed the Gentiles *as Gentiles* (Acts 15.6-11). Therefore, we can see an agreement between Pauline and Lukan theology that the presupposition that Gentiles can be Christians *as Gentiles* is based off the outward evidence that the Holy Spirit has chosen to include Gentiles into the people of God without any law observance being needed.

Spirit *cannot be dependent* upon observing law and if the Spirit of God is present in the community of believers independent of law then neither law observance nor law neglect is a primary factor in Christian status.

Since this argument deals primarily with defining what it is that determines whether or not someone can be considered a Christian it is important to notice the contrast here. It is assumed that the presence of the Holy Spirit is enough evidence that someone is authentically a Christian. Whether this came by some sort of shared culture or by previous teaching on the subject from Paul himself we cannot know. What we can know is that Paul did not expect any rebuttal along the lines of the Spirit being secondary to law observance. In other words he did not expect someone to retort, “The Spirit may be in us but what really matters before God is that law is observed.” He expects that the presence of the Spirit, apart from law observance, should satisfy his readers (v. 3).

The next statement by Paul is a bit vague. He asks his audience if they have suffered for no reason. The most straightforward reading would suggest that he knows of some sort of suffering that came during the time when there was no law observance. It is as if he is saying, “If this would have alleviated your suffering earlier why did you wait so long?” Nevertheless, Paul sees reason for continuing in the suffering. He does not think that their previous suffering was in vain. Whatever this suffering was caused by it appears to have been purposeful yet easily resolved by simple law observance (v. 4).<sup>3</sup>

Paul departs from this argument as quickly as he engaged it and he returns to his former assertion: the Holy Spirit was evident in your midst *apart from law observance*. He asks two

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3 I am led to suggest that the Judaizers persecuted these Gentile Christians in order to force them into law observance. Once the Galatian Christians ceased resistance the persecution let up. It may be that Paul knows this yet he wants to remind them that the solution is not to avoid suffering if this means compromising the gospel. Rather, the suffering had a purpose and it was worth suffering if this meant that the purity of the gospel would be retained.

more rhetorical questions: (1) did God supply the Holy Spirit to you when you were observing law or when you heard and believed and (2) when did you see the Spirit working “power-acts” amongst you (v. 5).<sup>4</sup> Since Paul knows how the Galatians ought to answer he goes on to provide Abraham as the model, even the forerunner, for the Galatians faith. “Just as Abraham believed in God” indicates that the Galatians were on the right side of this debate when they were modeling Abraham. Abraham’s belief is what was reckoned to him as righteousness before God (v. 6).

Again Paul proceeds with an “If A, then B” argument: if Abraham was made righteous before God by faith *then* those who are truly the children of Abraham are the ones that approach God like their father Abraham did which is by faith (v. 7). This is made evident because in Gen. 12.3; Gen. 18.18; and Gen. 22.18 where the promise to Abraham was that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In v. 16 Paul will clarify that, for the sake of his argument, the one seed of Abraham is Christ. In v. 14 he will make it known that the Gentiles receive the blessing of Abraham through Christ. Therefore, the *true identity marker* of the children of Abraham is not genetic but rather it is made evident by one’s faith in Christ.

It is here that the Apostle describes an essential yet often ignored definition of the gospel: in Abraham all the nations will be blessed. It is easy to read 1 Cor. 15.1-8 as the totality of Paul’s understanding of the gospel, but Paul’s understanding is a bit wider. It is part of the proclamation of the gospel that those who were once separate from the family of God are now incorporated via faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 8-9).

For those who seek to maintain their identity before God by means of law Paul quoted Deut. 27.26 from the LXX which reads, “Cursed is every man which does not continue in all the words written in this law, to do them.” From the LXX reading it is fairly easy to deduct that this

4 The ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, and NIV all translate δυνάμεις as “miracles”, which is a legitimate one, but it may obscure the broader nature of the word which is better understood through “power-acts”.

is essentially a curse since there is *no way* someone could keep *each* commandment of the Law. For Paul the Law is not a means of identity since no one observes it. Rather, the Law is simply something that cannot be upheld and therefore it is the source of a curse (v. 10).

To further his argument he reminds his readers of the statement in Hab. 2.4 that “The righteous will live by faith”. While as with Deut. 27.26 there was some interpretive space created to make this assertion, so with Hab. 2.4, yet Paul feels confident that the argument is firm. If it is *by faith* that someone lives therefore it is not by law. Rather, law is equated with a curse. The law is something that one must *do* and since Paul has made it obvious that we cannot *do* the law the statement “he will live by them” is essentially a death sentence (v. 11-12).

This message does not end pessimistically but rather with the reminder that Christ has died on our behalf. That “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law” means (1) that Christ has taken the curse on our behalf but also (2) that we do not need to seek law observance since the curse has already been absorbed by someone else. If Christ has taken the curse upon himself then this necessitates that there is nothing remaining for those who do not observe law to fear.<sup>5</sup>

Now Paul brings his argument together connecting back to v. 1 where he reminded the Galatians that his message had been about the crucifixion. Again, he now speaks about the crucifixion. The curse has been absorbed by Christ in the crucifixion because in Deut. 21.23 it says that anyone who hangs from a tree has been cursed. Christ hung from “a tree” (= wood) and therefore Christ was cursed (v. 13).

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<sup>5</sup> I am not at all insinuating that there is no “judgment” since only one verse back Paul said that those who want to continue to live by law will find the results to be a curse. Rather, for those who have faith in Christ there is no reason to worry about a curse being accompanied by our inability to maintain the law because that curse has already been absorbed by Christ on our behalf. Therefore, our lack of law observance cannot result in our being cursed since there is no curse left for those who have faith in Christ.

It is here that Paul reconnects three elements of his gospel proclamation that he has already alluded to beforehand. First, he shows that the gospel proclamation contains a message of the cross. Second, he reminds his readers that it is *because the curse has been absorbed* by Christ that the Gentiles can now be welcomed into the covenant. If Christ has taken the curse upon himself a Jew has no fear of lacking law observance in order to fellowship with Gentiles because no curse remains. Third, the Holy Spirit is alive and active in the life of the believer. The activity of the Spirit should be expected and the Spirit is the one who marks one out as a Christian (contra law). It was foretold by the prophets that the Spirit would dwell in believers in the new covenant, therefore the presence of the Spirit is a sign that one is part of new covenant fellowship which means, by deduction, that old covenant status is of no importance (v.14).

### **Conclusion: Pneumatological Aspect**

How does Gal. 3.1-14 contribute to our understanding of Paul's understanding of the Holy Spirit? First, the presence of the Holy Spirit is associated with faith. There are various views regarding whether or not one being filled with the Holy Spirit leads to faith (e.g. Reformed) or whether one having faith leads to the infilling of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Pentecostal). For Paul, in this passage, it seems apparent that the Holy Spirit comes *because* of faith, although elsewhere the Holy Spirit seems to be the catalyst of faith (v. 2).

The activity of the Holy Spirit is real and visible. This does not necessarily equate to the Pentecostal/Charismatic understanding but neither is the opposite true that the Holy Spirit should be expected to dwell within believers without there being something that evidences this (the declaration of faith may be one such evidence). That Paul could appeal to their receiving the Spirit seems to indicate they were well aware of the arrival of the Spirit in such a way that they could not doubt they received it, especially since Paul talks about "power-acts" (vv. 2, 5).

Finally, the Holy Spirit is part of the new covenant; part of the proclamation of the gospel. When Paul proclaimed the gospel he included the fact that Gentiles are now welcomed into the kingdom of God *as Gentiles*. This was evidenced by the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit has been available *because* Christ has absorbed the curse of the law. This allows Gentiles who were unable to approach God to suddenly become God's temple. Equally, this allows Jews who once were unable to be one people with Gentiles because the Law demanded distinctions that inhibited fellowship to now be one people, in Christ and in the Spirit, with Gentiles because the curse has been absorbed by Christ and therefore success or failure in law observance is neither here nor there because there is no remaining curse for those in Christ Jesus (v. 14)