

## CHAPTER 3: 1-29

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith. But, the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

## **COMMENTARY**

{1} - O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

The word "foolish" in Paul's rebuke is the Greek "*anoetos*". In the Greek language, placing the negative designation "a" in front of a word turns that word 180 degrees in the opposite direction. For instance, a person who believes and studies the things of God is a "theist". Someone who refuses to admit that God exists is an "a-theist". Someone who knows things intuitively is a "gnostic". But, someone who professes that they don't know is an "a-gnostic". The Greek word for faith is "pistis". Lack of saving faith is called "a-pistis". So, this word "*anoetos*" has at its root the word "*noeo*" which means "to perceive or understand." However, "a-noetos" means "without understanding, not applying the mind - unreflecting, unthinking." Paul accused the Galatian church of being thoughtless, not engaging their brains, as they were turning from the truth that Paul had laid open before them.

The truth of Christ - salvation by grace through faith without the works of the law - was plainly declared among the Galatians. Yet, they had been charmed, they

had been taken by an evil spell - "bewitched" - that led them away from the truth and persuaded them with lies and flatteries.

Paul had argued persuasively, showing from Scripture and revelation that Christ was the end of the law for all them that believed. In fact, Paul had so clearly explained Him that he could say that Christ was "evidently set forth" before their eyes. In other words, this was no great secret. The crucifixion and resurrection were very public events. And, Paul's preaching was published throughout the region.

Kenneth Wuest translates that phrase –

"Jesus Christ was publicly placarded as the crucified One."<sup>i</sup>

The preaching of the crucifixion was a signboard declaring openly that God was actively redeeming His people through the blood of His Son. Still, despite this public action and the personal teaching of Paul, the Galatians were under the bewitching influence of the Judaizers, seeking to accomplish their personal justification by acts of the flesh. As such, they were not obeying "the truth".

"So," said he, "let me ask you a few pointed questions" -

{2} - This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Good question! The Holy Spirit had been active and apparent in their congregations, bringing spiritual gifts and miracles. So, Paul asked, when did that happen? Did it occur when faith was being preached or when the law was being preached?

Although it's a rhetorical question, the answer is obvious. The Holy Spirit descended with the advent of the New Covenant, which opened the way to God by grace through faith. Never once in the entire history of the Mosaic Covenant did the Holy Spirit indwell men when they heard the law. Under Moses, the Spirit of God was external to men, descending once a year to fill the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. But, by the new and better way, the Spirit takes up residence in individual men, making them the tabernacle of God.

So, Paul has cornered his audience with that question. God's indwelling appearance accompanied the message of faith, not the letter of the law. But, he doesn't let up.

{3} - Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Here again Paul employed the word "*anoetos*". Are you so mindless? So unthinking? Are you under the false impression that you can start the journey of salvation in the spirit and then turn to your fleshly works to complete the trip?

This is a vital point of Pauline theology. And, far too many churches, both historic and contemporary, have strayed from this central truth. Preaching that men are justified freely by grace, they then bind their congregants under the restraints of endless rules and regulations. But, acts of the flesh cannot - I'll underscore that - CANNOT produce the level of perfection necessary to stand guiltless before the absolute Holiness of God.

Paul's argument was that the Galatian church had begun by believing the message of grace and the Holy Spirit accompanied that message, empowering it with God-ordained credibility. Yet, having started down the path of grace, now it appeared that the Galatians would turn to their own fleshly works and risk the grave spiritual consequences.

{4} - Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.

The message of Christ was resisted from many fronts and had countless enemies. Believers lost their homes, their families and their own lives. The first century church suffered under torture and constant fear of being found out. Paul asked, "Have you suffered all those things for nothing? What's the point?"

The Jewish religion had learned to coexist rather peacefully with its Roman rulers. But, when Christ came and the gospel spread, there were riots in the streets of Rome and fierce debates in every city where Christ was preached. The Jews demanded that the Roman government squash this new preaching in order to keep the peace, and the Romans were quick to comply. If the Galatian converts reverted to a form of Judaism there would be peace in the region. On the other hand, if they continued to embrace Paul's message of grace through Christ, they were inviting trouble. But, they had come so far and endured so much for sake of the gospel, why would they turn away now and make the sacrifice of the martyrs an empty gesture?

Still, Paul continued to hold out hope. He knew the power of the word he preached, and he knew the grace of the God who had called them. So, he added the phrase "...if it yet be in vain." There was still time to turn and stand firm for the gospel of grace.

{5} - He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Paul returned to the premise he began in verse 2. The "He" at the top of this verse is most likely a reference to God - the One who provided for their needs via the Holy Spirit and worked miracles of healing. And, again, when did that happen? Did it occur when the Judaizers were instructing them in the works of the law, or did it occur when Paul preached faith? Obviously, the answer is: "By the hearing of faith".

So, by the clear example of the manifestation of the Spirit, Paul drew God into the argument and showed which side He was on. While He blessed the preaching of grace, that same blessing did not accompany the legal lessons.

To Paul, this had always been the central message of Scripture. Remember that when Paul turned to the Word for support, he only had the Hebrew Bible – what we would call the Old Testament - available to him. So, he reached way back to the first Hebrew, the progenitor of all the Jews and Israelites. And, by using "Father Abraham" as an example, Paul set out to prove that God has always responded to faith and that faith is the only means to eternal justification.

{6} - *Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*

Not only is Abraham the progenitor of the Hebrew race, but he is such an important theological figure that his name appears in 27 of the 66 books of the Bible. He is mentioned in all four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Paul brings him up in Romans, 2 Corinthians and Galatians. The author of Hebrews writes of him extensively, James includes him and Peter mentions him in his first epistle. So, a proper understanding of Abraham and his connection to the New Covenant is essential.

Paul's primary point in bringing Abraham into the conversation is that Abraham was the first person in Scripture who is said to have achieved righteousness through the simple act of believing God. It's in Genesis 15:6 -

*"And he (Abram) believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."*

That phrase has become the bedrock of much of Paul's teaching. And, it's a marvelous thing that the verse even appears where it does! Only 15 chapters into the first book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the Holy Spirit made certain that Moses included these 14 words that would impact the entire history of God's dealings with Israel and church.

This exchange of faith for righteousness took place during Abraham's third meeting with God. At their first meeting, God promised:

- 1) To make Abram a great nation,
- 2) To bless him,
- 3) To make his name great,
- 4) That he would be a blessing,
- 5) That God would bless those that blessed him and curse those that cursed him, and -
- 6) Through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

At their second meeting God told Abram:

- 1) To look as far as he could in every direction because God was going to give him all the land of Canaan,
- 2) That He was going to make Abram's seed as innumerable as the dust of the earth, and -
- 3) That he should walk the length and breadth of the land because it would all be his.

Then, Abram had an encounter with Melchizedek, the king/priest of the most high God, whom I believe was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.<sup>ii</sup> And immediately after that, God met with Abram for a third time. God began by telling him not to fear because He was Abram's shield and exceeding great reward. Then God assured the aging man that he would have an heir of his own flesh who would inherit the promises and blessings of his father, saying –

"Look now toward Heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And, he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." (Gen.15:5)

Abram believed God. He believed that he would have an heir and that a son from his own bowels would inherit the land and blessings. In response, God counted that faith as righteousness.

### **A Bit of Interesting Etymology**

The Hebrew word translated "believed" in Gen. 15:6 is "*aman*". In its transitive sense it means, "to make firm, to confirm". In its intransitive sense it means "to be enduring, to trust, to believe". Remembering that there are no written vowels in the ancient Hebrew language, the word "*aman*" was transliterated into both Greek and English as "*amen*".

We get a feel for the meaning of this word when we read in Deuteronomy 7:9 - "the faithful (*aman*) God." Or, Isaiah 49:7, which declares, "Jehovah that is faithful (*aman*)." The Hebrew term had a wider variety of uses, including people expressing their assent to the word of God, or agreement with another's prayer. But, "*amen*" has come to mean "it is and shall be so" when God speaks it, and "so let it be" when spoken by men.

So, Abraham's response to God's promise of an heir - through whom the world would be blessed, through whom he would have innumerable seed and through whom the land of Canaan would become an everlasting possession - was "Amen". He stood firmly on God's word, trusting God to fulfill every word He had spoken. That's the core of faith, and that's what God responded to so favorably.

{7} - Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham?

Now, to a First Century descendant of Abraham, the promise of divine favor was an exclusive commodity, given to them in particular. However, Paul widened the field and - in his defense of justification by faith without the works of the law - argued that everyone, Jew or Gentile, who reacted to God's words in a fashion similar to Abraham was a spiritual descendant of that faithful father. In other words, the offer of righteousness in exchange for faith was a constant offer to anyone and everyone who would take advantage of it. It was true in Abraham's day, it was true in Paul's day, and it's just as true today.

Abraham was merely the prototype of justification by grace through faith. So, anyone who can truly "amen" the words of God - believing and trusting his every promise - are the offspring of that first faithful man.

By the way, this notion was heresy in the eyes of the Judaizers. That's why they opposed Paul so adamantly. To introduce Gentiles into the covenant of Abraham went against the very grain of their history, tradition and central theology.

{8} - And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

There's more to this verse than appears on the surface. Taken out of context, and with only an English translation, this verse has spawned all sorts of theories and conjecture. So, let's take it in parts -

And, the scripture...

The common assumption is that the book of Genesis was written by Moses, or at least at Moses' behest. It may be an amalgam of a couple different authors. Either way, it's self-evident that it was not written prior to Abraham's lifetime. So, this verse cannot be referring to the written scriptures, as we think of them, since only the first 14 chapters of Genesis predate Abraham. Most likely, this reference to "*graphie*" means "words of God" - specifically, the words spoken by God to Abraham and recorded in the larger body of Holy Writ.

...foreseeing that God...

The Greek word "*proeido*" means to see beforehand. In other words, God's promise to Abraham demonstrated His foreknowledge and foreordination. His words both foresaw and declared what He would do in the future.

...would justify the heathen through faith...

What God's words foresaw and foretold was that the blessing of justification through "*aman*", or the Greek "*pistis*" (faith), would spread beyond the Hebrew nation to include the "*ethnos*", or people of all races. Declaring that fact in advance, God's word of promise -

...preached before the gospel unto Abraham...

The phrase "preached before the gospel" is a single Greek word - "*proeuaggelizomai*". It appears only in this verse and it is made up of "*pro*", meaning "before", and "*euaggelizomai*" which means "to preach or tell a joyful message" or "to proclaim the good news". The root of that word is "*euaggelizo*", translated "glad tidings" or "gospel".

Now this is an important fact. The word "*gospel*", particularly when used with the definite article - "the gospel" – has garnered all sorts of emotional attachments that have obscured the simple meaning of the term. It simply means "good news". Paul used the term "gospel" in that way - to mean "good news" or "glad tidings".

For instance, Paul quoted Isaiah in Romans 10:15. The original verse read -

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Is.52:7)

When Paul quoted that verse, he wrote -

"As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Paul used the phrase "that preach the gospel of peace" as a replacement for "that bringeth good tidings, that publish peace". The terms "glad tidings" and "gospel" were synonymous in Paul's mind.

Now, the content or subject of any particular "good news" is determined by the context of the proclamation. Often times, Paul wrote of "the gospel" or "my

gospel" to designate preaching about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. However, the use of word "gospel" in the New Testament is not limited to that definition.

For instance, when Jesus went about in Galilee, He taught in their synagogues and preached "the gospel of the kingdom". He was not preaching his death, burial and resurrection. To any listening Jew, Jesus was talking about the kingdom promised to David's greater Son and the restoration of the nation of Israel. (Mat.4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:14) When Jesus described the events that would lead to His second coming, He said,

"And, this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Mat.24:14)

Again, in Mark 1:15, Jesus said,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Now, which gospel were they to believe? His death, burial and resurrection? No, that hadn't happened, yet. Jesus instructed the people to believe the good tidings that the kingdom of God was at hand.

In Luke chapter 9, Jesus sent his apostles out, giving them authority over devils and the ability to cure diseases –

"And, he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick...And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere." (v. 2 and 6)

Certainly, they were not preaching the resurrection, or even the substitutionary atonement. They neither believed nor knew anything about such events. They were specifically told to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

On the other hand, when the angel Gabriel informed Zacharias that he would have a son despite the fact that he was old and his wife was barren, he said,

"I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings." (Luke 1:19)

The term "glad tidings" is the Greek word "*euaggelizo*" - "gospel". The gospel delivered to Zacharias via an angel from God was the good news of a son.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:6 we read,

"But, now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings (euaggelizo) of your faith and charity..."

The gospel proclaimed by Timothy to Paul was that the members of the Thessalonian church were faithful and charitable.

And, when the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds in the fields, they said,

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings (euaggelizo) of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

The gospel declared to the shepherds was the birth, not the death and resurrection, of Jesus.

So, my point is simply that the term gospel, good news, glad tidings, "*euaggelizo*" simply means "good news about something". Again, the content or object of the good news is determined by the context.

So, now let's plug that into the verse under consideration: The word of promise from God foresaw and declared in advance that justification and righteousness would extend to all the nations of the earth, to everyone who had faith. This "good news" or "glad tiding" was preached to Abraham in the saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Galatians 3:8 is not declaring that Abraham somehow understood the vicarious suffering and death of Christ, nor his ultimate resurrection. It is simply saying that the good news of Gentile inclusion was forecast in God's promise "In thee shall all nations be blessed." In fact, we find nothing in terms of what we would call "atonement doctrine" spelled out in the Old Testament until the time of Isaiah, when he writes of the suffering servant in Chapter 53.

So, let's look at this verse again -

And the scripture - the promise of God - foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached in advance the good news to Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

And, to the Gentile audience who received the Galatians letter, that was certainly good news!

{9} - So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

The content of Abraham's saving faith was actually quite simple. He heard the word of God and he believed it. God promised him things and he hung his body

on the promise. God said "Move" and Abraham moved. God said, "All this is yours" and Abraham stood firmly convinced. And, that's really what faith is. Whatever God has said to you, believe it. Whatever promises you find in Scripture that pertain to you, stand on them firmly. Act as if God's word is more sure than your circumstances.

That's faith.

And, faith in God's sure and certain word is the only commodity of trade that can be exchanged for righteousness. Works won't do it. Good behavior can't do it. Acts of personal righteousness won't get it. Only faith brings you into the blessed lineage of Abraham, who received the immutable promises God made with Himself.

And that, my friends, is a very good place to be.

{10} - For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse:  
for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things  
which are written in the book of the law to do them.

The sad reality of the human condition is that far too many people are attempting to justify themselves through their good deeds and personal accomplishments. Biblical ignorance runs rampant and well-meaning men and women are venturing out into eternity armed with nothing more than their fleshly action, hoping that their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds and they will earn Heaven in the bargain.

But, Paul was adamantly opposed to such thinking. Time and again he reserved his most powerful language and convincing words for this subject - law verses grace. You can hear the desperation in his plea, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" (Gal.4:21) No one who understands the purpose and power of the law would ever desire to stand before God and be compared against the immovable, unbending standard of righteousness and risk the condemnation it brings. "Because the law worketh wrath..." (Rom. 4:15) The law can only condemn and it exists for the purpose of making sin all the more obviously sinful.

And, inasmuch as men are sinful in their flesh, sinful by their deeds, and rebellious by nature, the law will never be their advocate; it will only be their prosecutor.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20)

Paul drew a clear-cut distinction for the Galatians, leaving no gray area, no mix-and-match where the deeds of the flesh and the grace of God could intermingle. Either their entire hope of eternal peace and justification was accomplished in the finished work of Christ and their well-being was a gift of grace, through Abraham-like faith ----

--- OR ---

--- they would be tried on the basis of their works and personal merit, with the perfect, right and holy law of God as the measuring stick.

Who had twisted their thinking? Who bewitched them into thinking that their personal righteousness would carry them safely into the bosom of Abraham? Their own scripture would condemn them. The book of the Deuteronomical law clearly stated, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them..." (Deut. 27:26) On the basis of that statement, Paul concluded, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse." That curse is God's wrath and eternal separation.

Okay then, Paul, you must be saying that there is no hope. After all, the Old Testament only provides the option of living under the law. Right?

Nope.

The Hebrew Scriptures also plainly declared that a man could find peace and acceptance with God by faith.

{ 11 } - *But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.*

Paul quoted Habbakuk 2:4 –

"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith."

He also quoted this in Romans –

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17)

And, even the Hebrews author grabbed that phrase –

"Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Heb. 10:30)

According to Paul, this verse from Habakkuk makes it self-evident that no one will stand justified in God's sight by means of the law. Only faith will get the job done. Only faith will produce a righteousness sufficient to satisfy God's holy standard.

"So," you respond (because you're prone to ask questions), "let's say I'm convinced that the law is no help to me and my only hope of Heaven is by faith. I understand that intellectually, but what exactly IS faith? How will I know when I have it? What will it look like? Does the Bible clearly define it?"

Man! Questions, questions, questions. But, since you brought it up....

The best definition of faith in the Bible is in Romans 4:21. Paul had just recounted how Abram was given the promise that he and his heirs would inherit the world and Abram believed that promise, despite his childless condition and increased age. Let's let Paul tell us about it -

"Who, against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief (a-pistis), but was strong in faith, giving glory to God..."

Here it comes -

"And being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And, therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."  
(Rom. 4:18-22)

Abraham was strong in faith in this way - he was fully persuaded that what God had promised He was also going to accomplish. What God said He would do, Abraham believed He would do. That's faith. Faith looks at the promise of God and, despite every contrary circumstance, it hangs the body and the mind on "thus sayeth the Lord". Faith is fully persuaded that the word of God is more real and surer than our circumstances. To be faithful is to be completely convinced that whatever God says He will do, He will do.

So, how do we exercise this faith? We find a promise of God and cling to it. God promised us an eternal heritage. God promised salvation through His Son's shed blood. Jesus promised He'd be back to gather us to Himself. Are you fully persuaded of these things?

Yes?

Good!

That's faith! And, that's the faith that God trades for righteousness. That's the faith that leads to eternal life. That's the faith that accomplishes justification.

After all, "the just shall live by faith!"

{12} - And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Again, Paul made his argument very black and white. The law cannot redeem, but faith justifies. Working the works of the law is not the same as faith in the finished work of Christ. The law is not of faith. You cannot mix them together.

Paul based his comparison on Leviticus 18:5 –

"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them; I am the Lord."

So, anyone seeking justification by the works of the law is obviously not resting in faith. The two are diametrically opposed.

The law says, "If you can do this perfectly, perpetually and personally then you'll have a claim to life on the basis of earned righteousness."

BUT...

Faith says, "Rest in the finished work of Christ who kept the law completely and took both our sin and the law to His cross, removing them both. And, having removed both our guilt and the ordinance that required our punishment, He burst forth from the belly of the earth, accomplishing our justification and imputing righteousness to us."

"Now it was not written for his (Abram's) sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification." (Rom.4:23-25)

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col 2:13-14)

Paul was driving home the central theme of the Galatian letter. Men will approach God one of two ways - they will be judged for their deeds and stand condemned before the Holy, righteous standard of perfect obedience; or they will

stand accepted in the Beloved, wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness, obtained by faith.

{13} - Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

For the faithful believer, the curse has been removed. No longer are we in fear, awaiting the day of God's wrath and vengeance. We have been redeemed - bought out by the One who could pay the sufficient price. The way Christ paid our price was by taking the curse of sin upon Himself and taking the wrath of God in our place. The price of sinless blood was paid and the heritage of God was redeemed.

Once more, Paul turns to the book of Deuteronomy to defend his point. This time it's 21:22-23 -

"And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

In preparation for the day when God would nail His own Son to a tree, He included in the law that a man who was so guilty that death was the only remedy would be hung from a tree and accursed of God. So, said Paul, when Jesus hung on His plank of wood, the curse of the Law came down on Him, satisfying the righteous anger and judgment of God that required death for sin.

And, interestingly, Joseph of Arimathaea kept the details of this prophetic bit of the law when he begged for the body of Christ and put it in the sepulcher before the night fell.

{14} - That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The "blessing of Abraham" was described in verse six - "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." That's the primary subject of this whole passage. As a consequence, every person who exhibits the faith of Abraham is the offspring of Abraham - Jew or Gentile. And, they share in the blessing of Abraham - "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." (v.9)

And, just as the Holy Spirit had fallen at Pentecost, bringing 3,000 Jews to faith, the Spirit was now reaching out into the Gentile world. The promise of the Spirit - "And, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John. 14:16) - had come to every faithful disciple.

Christ became a curse in order to redeem the faithful from the curse of the law in order that the blessing of righteousness in exchange for faith would flow to believers of every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation.

{15} - Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

The Old English word "disannul" has fallen out of popular use. While our contemporary English frowns on "double negatives", they were an accepted form of emphasis in the Greek language. The Greek "*atheteo*" is a compound of the negative "a-", and a derivative form of "*tithemi*", which is the opposite of "to commit, make, ordain, set down, or settle." When stuck together they mean, "to cast off, to despise, to frustrate, bring to naught, or reject."

This is Paul's way of saying, "A deal's a deal". The manner of men is that once two men enter into a covenant or contract with each other, no one from the outside can add anything to that agreement or take anything from it. In fact, they themselves cannot add or subtract from the deal without the mutual consent of both parties. As long as the contract is in force it is binding on them both and neither individual, nor any outside entity, can void the deal.

Paul is going to apply that basic, self-evident principle to Hebrew history and use this premise to confirm the ongoing effects of the Abrahamic Covenant. In order to understand the next few verses, though, we must keep in mind the central truth that no person can add or subtract from the covenant contracts of God. Every detail is important and no details can be deleted or "added to", once God strikes the deal.

{16} - Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'And to seeds', as of many; but as of one, 'And to thy seed', which is Christ.

In his book "Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology",<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum argues that while the church has been fastidious in the development of systematic doctrine on nearly every Biblical subject, the systematic study of Israel in scripture is sadly lacking. David Morris added that he would like to see a study of the word "seed" in scripture - he'd call it "Seedology". In his book, "Abraham's Four Seeds"<sup>iv</sup> John Reisinger recognized

that the term "seed" has at least four distinct Biblical uses, designating particular people. One of those particular "seed" designations is spelled out in this verse.

The most common "seed" designation points to the physical offspring of Abraham. In such cases, the term "seed" denoted a massive group of people. For instance, when God struck His covenant with Abraham, He said –

"Unto thy seed will I give this land." (Gen.12:7)

And,

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."  
(13:15-16)

When Abraham countered, "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed..." (Gen 15:3), he was speaking of a natural heir, the firstborn through whom the rest of the descendants would flow. In this instance, "seed" had a singular sense. In other words, Abraham was saying, "I know you promised me innumerable offspring, but I don't even have the first child." So, the term "seed" was used in both a plural and singular sense in the Old Testament.

As God moved through the severed animals to confirm His covenant, He proclaimed –

"I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And, I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Gen.17:7-8)

In contrast to the singular seed, God promised to establish His covenant with Abraham's natural offspring, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant. And, the land was spoken of as "an everlasting possession". Each time that God confirmed His word to Abraham, He included "and thy seed after thee".

Then, when Abraham laid his only son on the sacrificial altar, both the act of the father willingly sacrificing his son, as well as the son of men going free when God provided a sacrificial lamb as a substitute, prefigured the atoning work of Christ. It was at that very juncture in redemptive history that God added this very specific promise –

"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen.22:18)

So, a parallel was established between the singular promised child, Isaac - in whom Abraham's seed would be called (Gen.21:12, Rom.9:7, Heb.11:18) - and the singular promised Son of God - in whom the elect seed would be called.

This promise of a "blessed seed" harkened back to the promise made in the Garden of Eden when God leapt over the centuries and told both Eve and Satan how the necessary redemption from sin would occur.

"I will put enmity between thee [the serpent] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his [the singular seed's] heel." (Gen.3:15)

Paul grabbed that strain of promises and announced that that singular seed was the person, Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, back in history, when God confirmed the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac, the promises to the "seed" plural and to the "seed" singular were combined. God said –

"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." (Gen.26:4)

The only possible conditions placed on the covenant God made with Himself were actually kept by Abraham – he had obeyed God's voice, kept His charge, His commandments, His statutes and His laws. As a result, from Isaac forward, the Abrahamic Covenant was utterly unconditional and confirmed by the immutability of God's own person. Thus, it is impossible to conclude anything other than that God will, without fail, keep every facet, every detail, and every whit, of His promises.

God promised Isaac three things:

- 1) That Isaac's descendants would be innumerable.
- 2) That they would inherit all the countries of Canaan, and –
- 3) That the particular descendant would bring blessing to every nation of earth.

These three promises are irrevocable, unconditional, unchangeable, everlasting, sure and certain.

Okay, back to the text at hand. The context of this section of Paul's letter to the Galatians is the proof that the law (which the Judaizers were attempting to force on the Gentile converts) was done away with. First off, the law was contradictory to faith. (v.12) Secondly, Christ set believers free from the law when He bore the

curse of law in our place. (v.13) As a consequence, the blessing of Abraham - righteousness imputed in exchange for believing God's word - came through Christ. Via the substitutionary atonement, the blessing of Abraham extended to all nations and peoples, Jew or Gentile. (v.14) And, through the gifted act of believing - having faith - the promised Holy Spirit takes up residence in every believer. (v.14)

Then, Paul addressed the natural question - "What about the law's relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant?" He started by reminding his readers that even human covenants cannot be done away with or added to. (v.15) Then, to put a fine point on the subject, Paul identified the singular seed who was foretold in the Abrahamic promises.

Here's the logic: If Christ was the fulfillment of the promised blessing to all nations, then the Abrahamic Covenant was still being fulfilled even after the law had been given. The establishment of the law, then, must have had no effect on God's continuing attention and participation in the Abrahamic Covenant. Hence, the Abrahamic promises were superior to the law.

*{17} - And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*

There's been plenty of debate over the last two thousand years about the Abrahamic Covenant and whether God meant "forever" and "everlasting" when He said it. Folk who are convinced that God has washed His hands once and for all of the Nation of Israel are hard-pressed to deal with those terms. So, they conclude that God must have meant something other than what He said. Or, they argue that the meaning of the words had changed in their New Testament usage. In other words, when God said "everlasting" in the New Covenant, He meant "everlasting, eternal, or forever". However, when God used those words to Abraham, He actually meant "temporal, short-lived, or limited".

In dealing with the promises to Abraham, the author of Hebrews stated -

*"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself..." (Heb. 6:13)*

He continued the thought in verse 17 and 18 -

*"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation..."*

So, even in the New Testament we read that the Abrahamic promises, when God swore on Himself, are immutable because they are based on God's immutability. And, that's Paul's point here. The Law of Moses occurred 430 years after the immutable promise, the covenant that cannot be altered or added to. The Law of Moses ended when Christ nailed it to His tree and bore the penalty of death. (Col.2:14) The Old Covenant - the law - came to a screeching halt and the New Covenant of faith in Christ began when He burst out of the grave, establishing the resurrection of the dead and eternal life.

However, according to this verse in Galatians, the Abrahamic covenant continued - unaltered, unchanged, still actively in force. The inception and destruction of the law could not make the Abrahamic promises "of no effect". Just the opposite! The death, burial and resurrection of Christ established the Abrahamic promises, ushering in the New Era of salvation by grace through faith, the irrevocable blessing that spread to all nations.

Now, let's stir the soup a bit. (I'm a committed soup-stirrer, after all.)

As we saw earlier, the "land promise", the "innumerable seed promise", and the "all nations will be blessed promise" were all recited verbatim to Isaac. They were unconditional and everlasting. (Gen.17:7-8, 19) They were also passed on to Jacob as an everlasting promise. (Gen.48:4)

Israel was aware that the establishment of the law did not negate their promises. When King David returned the Ark of the Covenant - the golden chest containing the Tablets of Stone - to Jerusalem, he stood before the people and delivered his first psalm. In it, David preached -

"O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones, He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance when ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it." (1<sup>st</sup>Chron.16:14-19)

David ruled under the Law of Moses, but he reminded the nation of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. David knew that Abraham's promises were unaffected by the inception of the law and would remain in force to a thousand generations.

So, we have it on both Old and New Testament authority that the covenant made with Abraham is not, nor can be, annulled or changed. However, some theologians divide the Abrahamic Covenant into two categories - "spiritual" and "physical". They argue that Paul only defended the "spiritual" aspects of the

Abrahamic Covenant - faith, grace, salvation, and justification - while the "physical" aspects were somehow changed or done away with altogether. In other words, the "all nations will be blessed promise" is certainly active, everlasting and beyond doubt. On the other hand, the physical "land promise" is negated, annulled or superceded by the promise of Heaven.

But, God spoke those two promises (along with the promise of innumerable offspring) to Isaac in the same breath. Importantly, there are no verses in Scripture that deny or alter the "land promise". There are no verses that "spiritualize" it - which would be to "change" or "add to" it. Just as one aspect of Abraham's promises has been and is being fulfilled, the "land promise" rests with Israel, immutable and unchangeable. Of course, that implies that God is not finished with Israel as a people or nation. And, that's why folk who start with that supposition must also change what Paul declared as unchanging, or add to the covenant that Paul says no man can add to.

As an interesting side note, many of the same theologians who are willing to break the Abrahamic Covenant into compartments which are variously fulfilled or abolished are the very same people who rise up in arms against theologians who compartmentalize the Mosaic Covenant into civil, ceremonial and moral laws, which are then either still in force or abolished.

Just as the Mosaic Law was an "all or nothing" proposition, the Abrahamic Covenant is one whole package on which rests the faithfulness of God to Himself and His word. And, just as Christ is the center point and impetus behind the "all nations will be blessed promise", He will also be the power that draws Israel, establishes Israel, and returns them to their promised land.

"In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And, it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And, I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (Zech.12:8-10)

That's consistent, New Covenant, Pauline thinking. But, keep reading...

{ 18 } - "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise."

What inheritance? This is the first time Paul has mentioned an inheritance in this letter.

He has been talking about the Abrahamic promises and how they cannot be altered, when he suddenly introduced an inheritance given to Abraham. So, how would the First Century recipients of Paul's letter have understood this reference to an inheritance?

You know where this is going, don't you?

The Abrahamic promises were passed down through Israel from generation to generation. They were "inherited", in their entirety, by the descendants of Abraham - Isaac, Jacob, and ultimately Ephraim.<sup>v</sup> In Paul's day, he stated that they had received the "blessing of Abraham" - righteousness by faith through grace - when Christ died. They had received the "promise of Abraham" - that all nations would be blessed and that the Holy Spirit would come - at Pentecost. In keeping with that promise, Gentile believers were brought into the covenant as grafted-in wild branches. (Rom.11:17) And then Paul reminded them of "the inheritance".

It's important to recognize first off that Paul did not redefine the historic, traditional understanding of what Israel would inherit. He knew that the very term "inheritance" was universally understood. It meant the third aspect of the Abrahamic covenant - the land promise.

God said to Abram –

"I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." (Gen.15:7)

Isaac to Jacob –

"And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessings of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger." (Gen.28:3-4)

God to Israel –

"By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land." (Ex.23:30)

Moses to God –

"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever." (Ex.32:13)

These are the only times that the word "inherit" appears in Genesis and Exodus, and each time it refers specifically to the land of Canaan. Through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the word "inherit" always deals with an individual's lot within the Promised Land.

But, even after Israel moved into Canaan, fell into rebellion, was removed and scattered, the prophet Isaiah assured Israel –

"The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." (Is.60:19-21)

Jeremiah predicted not only that God would take Israel out of their land, but also that He would return them –

"Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbors, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. And, it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out, I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land." (Jer.12:14-15)

There are plenty of other Old Testament references and they all fall along this same line. God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit Canaan. But, first they would spend 430 years in Egypt. God brought Israel back to that very land, but they rebelled against His authority and broke His law. In response, God brought their enemies down on them and scattered them out of their inheritance. But, that did not negate the promise of God, which is unchanging. The prophets foretold the time when God would regather His people and finally grant them their land with peace and prosperity.

That's the only promised inheritance the First Century audience would have been familiar with in their Scriptures. When Paul brought up the subject of the inheritance promised to Abraham, they would naturally have understood him to mean the "land promise" and the restoration of Israel.

But, it appeared for all practical purposes that the promised inheritance had been negated because of Israel's refusal to keep God's law. Even today, the "Israel Replacement" crowd bases their argument on the notion that Israel's failure to keep the law resulted in God's abandonment. But, look, look, look at Paul's argument!

The inheritance wasn't by the law! It was by promise! The law that came 430 later did no damage to the promise! The inheritance remained secure.

And, it remains secure to this day. Just because God hasn't done it yet doesn't mean that He won't do it. That's Paul's argument - Look! God has confirmed and kept the blessing of Abraham! He did it in Christ! He kept the promise of a singular seed through whom would come the worldwide blessing! He did it in Christ! And, the promised inheritance is just as sure and certain! He will do it through Christ, when He gathers His people and sets His Son on David's throne, ruling His chosen people, Israel.

If part of the Abrahamic covenant survives, the entirety survives. The law doesn't enter in to it. Israel's failure could not stop the appearance and blessings of Christ, neither can it stop, negate, change or add to the promised inheritance. Everything Israel inherited from Abraham, Israel must receive through Christ.

Everything.

{19} - Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

So, what's the point of the law? It was added because Israel was sinful. It was added to the nation to convict them and hold them guilty. It was designed to drive them to their Savior. But, once the "seed" came, the One who instituted the New Covenant, the law had served its function and was done away with.

And, by contrast, the angels who ordained the law through the hands of the mediator, Moses, were superceded by the Son of God who ordained His superior covenant and was, Himself, the mediator.

{20} - Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

In other words, Christ did not mediate between God and God. God is one and a single person needs no mediation with himself. Moses stood between God and Israel, mediating their agreement. Likewise, Christ stands between God and believers, mediating their agreement. God's covenants are with men; otherwise there is no need for an intercessor.

{21} - Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

This is Paul's summary statement. Is there any conflict between the Law of Moses and Abrahamic Promises? No, God forbid. God does not conflict with Himself. The Abrahamic Covenant promised life, which the law could never accomplish. The Abrahamic Covenant promised blessing, the law resulted in cursing. The Abrahamic Blessing was righteousness by faith, the law accomplished guilt, sinfulness and death.

If the law could offer life and the Abrahamic Covenant also offered life, we'd have a genuine dilemma on our hands. Which method should we follow if they were both valid? But, Paul wanted the contrast to be obvious. There is only one approach to God that will result in eternal righteousness and salvation. That's by grace, through Abraham-like faith. The law, the flesh, and personal works could never assure any individual of a right standing with God. And, that – according to Paul - was one more reason that the Galatians should not be persuaded to follow that course.

{22} - But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. BUT!

Paul argued that the Law of Moses was incapable of accomplishing eternal life and justification in the sight of God. If there ever were such a law - one that could have given life - then aligning one's self with that law could have earned personal righteousness. BUT!

The law was added in order that sin would appear all the more sinful. The law proved the firm conclusion that every individual is guilty. As an obvious consequence - being in that all mankind are sinners - no one ever followed any standard of righteousness to the point of perfection.

Paul's point?

He has been beating back the notion that returning to the unbending Mosaic Law was required of Gentile believers in order to attain peace and righteous standing with God. BUT, there were two problems –

- 1) Every man is a sinner, and-
- 2) Even if there were a law that could offer eternal life, it would be of no use, considering that no man could keep it.

And that, according to Paul, was exactly God's point when He imposed the law on sinful men. Once it concluded every person under sin, God could offer imputed righteousness as a free gift to every person who had faith like Abraham's.

{23} - But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

The law had a specific function in the protection and progress of God's people. In the general sense, prior to the revelation of faith as the means of sanctification, the law kept Israel in custody, locked up under regulations for their own protection. In a more personal sense, before we as individual believers came to understand the message of grace, God's law stood over our conscience like a taskmaster, making sure we understood our inadequacy, and sending us searching for a Savior. The law pointed out our misdeeds and transgressions, keeping us from running hog wild, and preparing us for the way of faith that would later be revealed to us.

{24} - Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

In searching for a suitable metaphor to describe this protective function of the law, Paul likened it to a "*paidagogos*". That Greek term is a combination of "*pais*", a child, and "*agogos*", a leader. Originally, "*paidagogos*" referred to the slave who conducted boys from home to the school. But, it was also used to designate the teacher or educator.

So, the law was a teacher, a tutor, an instructor who led children. To follow Paul's choice of metaphors, then, spiritually immature persons need a "*paidagogos*". They are still learning, not yet apprehending the nature of faith. But, the curriculum of our education was to convict us of our unworthiness, driving us toward the Savior and a means of justification that actually worked.

{25} - "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."

Again, Paul's contrast is clear. He never mixed law and grace. Once a person learns about salvation by grace through faith, he no longer needs the tutor. He has graduated. He has moved on.

This mixing of law and grace continues to permeate the 20th Century church. The phrase, "Moses drives us to Jesus for justification, then Jesus drives us to Moses for sanctification" is practically a war cry in many evangelical circles. But, if we have truly understood the ramifications of faith, we would never dream of returning to the law. The justification that faith affords is a complete and superior justification, needing no additional work or added righteousness.

The atonement that Christ accomplished was a complete atonement, redeeming us wholly - body, mind and spirit. There is nothing in the tenets of the Law that

can add to the finished work of Christ. In fact, to whatever degree we attempt to add our personal righteousness to the redemptive work of Christ, to that degree make the cross of Christ of no effect. To say that we must add something to His work is to say that He left some portion of salvation unfinished, waiting for us miserable sinners to validate His offering and complete His efforts.

Once faith has come, there is no more room for the Law. The two are polar opposites, not to be intermingled.

{26} - For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

We did not inherit our family status by our works. God chose us to join the great, eternal family, placed His spirit in us, and graciously gifted us with the faith that saves. We became children of God - and we retain that status - by faith, not by fleshly effort.

{27} - For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

While Paul doesn't take the time to develop his doctrine of baptism here, he did take a moment in the book of Romans to draw the parallel between Christ's death, burial and resurrection and the death of our sinful flesh, our burial in the baptismal waters, and our rising from the water to walk in newness of life.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom.6:3-5)

To the Galatians, Paul's point was that when they were baptized, they "put on" Christ. Their sinful flesh was covered by Christ's personal righteousness. Their baptism was a means of identifying themselves with Christ's death and resurrection. They were in Him. Their sins were on Him. Their death and resurrection to everlasting life was accomplished through Him when He died and rose again.

Inversely, by faith Christ is in us. Just as we died in Him, He lives in us. Just as He became sin for us, we become righteous through Him. Just as he was subject to wrath, separation and death, we are promised that we have escaped wrath (Rom.5:9, 1<sup>st</sup>Thes.1:10), he will never leave or forsake us (Heb.13:5), and we are passed from death to life (John 5:24). And, just as He rose from the dead perfect and ever living, we are guaranteed the bodily resurrection and the life eternal.

Having therefore "put on" Christ - and, having His righteousness imputed to our account - we are truly the children of God, just as He is the true Son of God. We are brothers and sisters of Christ, joint-heirs of the heavenly blessings. (Rom. 8:17) By faith in the finished work of our Elder Brother, we are securely positioned in our Eternal Father's estate.

{28} - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,  
there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

The family of God is made up of children from every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation. The promise of salvation by faith is flung open to everyone who believes. Despite the fact that Israel had a long history as God's chosen people, when it came to salvation by faith, there was no advantage to being Jewish. Where the Jews considered the Gentiles to be heathen dogs, the love of God was poured out without deference or respect of persons.

Likewise, in the Greco-Roman society there were several classes of people. The two most distinct classes were free men and slaves. A man could be born a free citizen, or he could buy his freedom, if he could afford it. But, a slave was little more than chattel. A slave was merely a possession, hardly a human being. Still, the offer of salvation by faith spread past such economic and societal boundaries. It was accessible to the freest man, all the way up to the Caesar. And, it was available to the lowliest slave, like Philemon.

And, one of the most obvious societal distinctions in ancient cultures, both Jewish and heathen, was the second-class status of women. Men ruled and dominated the culture. Women had only those rights that their husband allowed them and they were relegated to a dependant position, relying on their husband for their every need. Where a man could divorce a wife, a wife could not divorce a husband. If a woman had a female child in Rome, the husband had the right to keep it, dispose of it, or sell it. Among the Hebrews, a man could have multiple wives, but the wife could have only one husband. A man could have concubines, but a woman could not have extramarital lovers. A widow in that society was without an income, without a home and without rights. But, salvation by faith in Christ drew no such distinctions. Any person, male or female, could be included in the family of faith and share in the blessings of Christ.

Jew, Gentile, free, bond, male, female - it didn't matter. In Christ, they were all one and the same. They were covered by the same blood, redeemed by the same sacrifice, and brought into fellowship by the same Spirit.

Now, one last comment - much is made of this verse by folk who are determined that God has cast off the nation of Israel and that Gentile believers have, in fact, become the new or "true" Israel. They see the amalgam of Jew and Gentile in this verse as proof that the distinction between them is done away with. However, the balance of this verse makes that position pretty untenable.

The distinction between Jew and Gentile remained - and remains - even though members of both groups are saved by faith. To eliminate the Jew/Gentile distinction in this verse, we would have to likewise argue that males and females lose their distinction once they come to Christ, and that freemen and slaves lose their distinction. But, when a slave came to faith he was not automatically freed from his shackles. And, when a woman came to faith, she did not cease to be a woman.

So, obviously then, a Jew who believes on Christ is a Messianic Jew, or a converted Jew, or whatever label you may place on him. But, he is still a Jew. On the other hand, when a Gentile believes on Christ he does not cease to be a Gentile. He does not become Jewish, nor does he somehow enter into Israel - nationally, historically, ethnically or spiritually.

Paul's point in this verse is that such obvious distinctions are no hindrance when it comes to receiving salvation by grace through faith. But, that does not erase the distinction.

{29} - *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

This verse poses a contrast against verse 16. Back in verse 16 Paul argued that Abraham's seed was a singular seed, Christ, to whom the promises were made. Yet, in verse 29 Paul expands the "seed" concept, using it in a plural sense, designating a group of people who are not Christ, but who believe in Christ. So, as we noted earlier, "seed" has several uses, denoting several different people.

Paul has been developing his doctrine that Abraham had faith - he believed what God told him - and God counted that faith for righteousness. Anyone who exhibits Abraham-like faith, then, is the "seed" or offspring of Abraham. Whether Jew or Gentile, natural descendant or not, they are his spiritual children. And, they are heirs to the blessing that God promised to Abraham - "In thee shall all nations be blessed". (v.8)

Now, lest you think I just contradicted myself, let me draw some clear divisions -

By faith, Gentiles are Abraham's seed. They are his spiritual offspring. That fact does not do away with his natural offspring, nor does it eliminate God's dealings with His descendants after the flesh.

Nevertheless, nowhere in Scripture are Gentiles ever referred to as "spiritual Israelites" or "spiritual Jews".

Here's why:

[1] You can be a natural descendant of Abraham and not be a Hebrew. You'd be Ishmael.

[2] Abraham was told, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called". But, you can be a natural descendant of Isaac and not be "the seed". You'd be Esau.

[3] Jacob had his name changed to Israel, becoming the progenitor of the twelve tribes, called Israel. But, you can be a natural descendant of Jacob and not be a Jew. You'd be a member of Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph (Ephraim and Manassah), Dan, Naphtali, Gad or Asher. Only the descendants of Judah, Benjamin and Levi were called Jews.

Now, this is vital and is all-too-often overlooked:

In order to be an Israelite you had to be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – all three. All three forefathers are mentioned whenever the descent and inheritance of Israel are mentioned. For instance, see Deut. 1:8, 6:10, 9:5, 9:27, 29:13, 30:20, 34:4, Josh. 24:2-3, 2Kings 13:23, 1Chron.16:16-17, Psalm 105:9-10, Jer. 33:26, Mat. 8:11, 22:32, Mark 12:26, Luke 13:20, 20:37, Acts 3:13, 7:32.

While the Bible plainly declares that men and women of faith are the spiritual offspring of Abraham - sharing a common belief that is exchanged for righteousness - the scripture never calls Gentiles the spiritual offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Nor are they ever called the spiritual offspring of Judah, Benjamin or Levi. Hence, they are never referred to as spiritual Israel or spiritual Jews. They don't meet the qualifications and are never, ever referred to in such a manner.

Those are very important classifications, the lack of which have lead to all sorts of confusion and creative theology.

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<sup>i</sup> Wuest, Kenneth. *The New Testament – An Expanded Translation*. Grand Rapids. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1989

<sup>ii</sup> For a complete overview of Melchizedek in Scripture, please see the author's Commentary on the Book of Hebrews. Chapter 7.

<sup>iii</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. Th.M., Ph.D. *Israelology: The Missing Link In Systematic Theology*. Tustin, Ca. Ariel Ministries Publishing. 1992

<sup>iv</sup> Reisinger, John G. *Abraham's Four Seeds*. Frederick, MD. New Covenant Media. 1998

<sup>v</sup> For a historic overview of the descent of the Abrahamic Covenant to Ephraim, see the author's commentary on the book of Hebrews, Chapters 7 and 8.