

Dr. Tim Gombis, Galatians, Session 5, Galatians 3

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This is Dr. Tim Gombis in his teaching on the book of Galatians. This is session 5 on Galatians 3.

Well, welcome to the fifth lecture in Galatians. This lecture is going to walk through Galatians three, which, according to many scholars, is the most tangled stretch of Pauline text apart from maybe Roman seven. If you read through Galatians commentaries and works on Galatians, you will routinely find statements along that line that this is the most difficult patch, especially Galatians three, 10 to 14, the passage involving the curse of the law. But it's in this stretch of text where a lot of the Pauline debates come down, and a lot of the difficulties in Pauline texts and Pauline theology sort of come to bear.

Let's keep in mind as we make our way through this text that Paul's ultimate rhetorical aim here is to convince the Galatians not to Judaize. He's trying to basically warn the non-Jewish Christians in Galatia not to accept the pressure that these Jewish missionaries are bringing to bear that they need to be circumcised and convert to Judaism and to begin to follow the law of Moses just like the Jews would be doing; the Jewish Christians would be doing. Also, keep in mind that the statements that Paul makes here are not Pauline theology in the abstract.

Again, this is not a systematic theology. This is highly charged rhetorical material oriented toward convincing the Galatians to do something and not do something. This is not sort of what Paul thinks in the abstract.

We'll keep that in mind as we make our way through a number of the things that Paul has to say. Let's take first Galatians 3:1 through 5, where Paul begins this passage by addressing the Galatians, and he says to them, you foolish Galatians who have bewitched you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Now, what in the world does that mean when Paul says that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed? Well, this probably refers to Paul's original preaching there in Galatia, and in my opinion, he's actually referring to Paul's personal presentation.

Remember what I said in previous lectures where Paul landed there in Galatia after being stoned to death and, according to Luke's record anyway, miraculously resuscitated and brought back to life? He very obviously looked a mess as even if that's not necessarily the background. He says in chapter four of Galatians that his appearance, he knows that it put them to the test. So, he's likely referring to how, in his very person, as he proclaimed the gospel to them, he himself was a demonstration of Jesus Christ crucified.

As ugly as a beaten bloody corpse was on a Roman cross, that's how hideous and ugly Paul was in his presentation to them, and it was in that condition that he presented the gospel to them the first time. Along this line, keep in mind in chapter one, verse 16, Paul mentions that God revealed his son in Paul. So, Paul's own story was already a revelation of Jesus Christ, just as his presentation there in Galatia originally was a presentation of Jesus Christ.

And he also gets at this idea in Galatians 2:20 just above this text where he speaks about Jesus Christ and living out his life in Paul's own life. This passage also calls to mind, and this note also calls to mind Paul's letter to the Corinthians, his first letter to the Corinthians where he says to them in chapter two, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, even him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

So, Paul's not talking merely about the content of his preaching there when he arrived in Corinth. He's speaking about his performative ministry mode. That was what Paul was committed to in his presence as he says in 2 Corinthians 4, he carries around the death of Jesus in his body, knowing that when he behaves that way, when he ministers that way, the life of Jesus is unleashed in performances of the cross.

Anyway, this is just a little note that recalls his original presence with them. Paul then goes on in verse 2, again in verse 3, and again in verse 5 to ask them a number of rhetorical questions. This is the only thing I want to find out from you.

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? He again contrasts works of law and hearing with faith in verse 5. So, we have this contrast between works of law and hearing with faith, or that phrase can be variously translated as faithful hearing or a hearing that results in faithfulness or a hearing that elicits faithfulness perhaps. So this contrast between the pressure being brought to bear. By the Jewish Christian missionaries on these non-Jewish Christians in Galatia to conform to a Jewish identity, and that's what Paul means by works of law. And he's asking them this whole beginning that you made when you received the Spirit. Tell me, how did that happen? Did it happen simply by your response to the hearing of the gospel of faithfulness or did it happen by your adoption of a Jewish identity? Obviously, the answer is that it happened because of their faithful hearing of the message that Paul proclaimed.

It did not happen by their adoption of a Jewish identity. Then he asks again, in verse 5, if he provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you. Does he do it by

the adoption of a Jewish identity or by hearing that elicits faithfulness or a hearing that accompanies faith? Something like that. And he's just; Paul is just trying to get at the response of the Galatians, which is commendable, that when they hear the gospel and God's word, they respond with faith.

That faithful hearing in verses 2 and 5 is a direct parallel, as we'll see in the passage that follows. It's a direct parallel with Abraham's response of faith or faithfulness to the announcement of God. And this is why I said that these antinomies in Galatians are not doing and believing or something like that.

It's not a contrast of an absence of human action and a highlight of God's action. The contrast really is that there are two kinds of holistic human responses involving action and attitudes. Involving external behaviors and internal dispositions.

The contrast is some kind of response that is generated below. Some kind of response that meets social expectations. Some kind of response that comes from this world of imagination or expectations or human manipulation or human response, whatever it is.

On the other hand, human action, human attitude, and human postures are the ones that are a response to God's initiative. Basically, how Paul depicts himself there in Galatians 1, when he received a revelation to go to Arabia, he went. When he received a revelation to go to Jerusalem, he went.

When he receives a word to do this, he doesn't. So, Paul is not afraid of ever stressing human action. But there's a kind of human action that is the embodiment of faith or faithfulness.

And there's a kind of human action that is not approved by God. So the contrast here is between works of law, behaving in a way in response to the gospel that meets social expectations but is not what God wants, and responding to the gospel in a way that is the embodiment of faith or faithfulness. Paul also asks again in verse 3, are you so foolish, having begun by the spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? So his notation of this beginning in a race to the eschatological day that was begun by the spirit, is it now going to be perfected by the flesh? Again, associating the adoption of Jewish identity with a response that comes from below, that comes from this world.

It doesn't come by revelation from the outside world into their existence. So, this contrast between human expectations, social standards, et cetera, and the response of faith or faithfulness. Paul goes on then in verses 6 to 9, to commend those who are of faith in verses 6 to 9, and to associate them with Abraham.

That is going to be in contrast to what he does in verses 10 to 14 when he says that those who are of the works of the law are actually under a curse. That tangled stretch of text that's very, very complicated and difficult, but we'll get to it. So there's a contrast here, verses 6 to 9. Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham.

Those who are of works of law are actually under a curse. It's important to grasp this point that these two groups, those of faith and those of works of law, are the two groups of people involved in this controversy in Galatia. This is not a reference in the abstract to two kinds of people, even in the first century.

All Christians are blessed because they are the people who are of faith, because the alternative would be everyone who is of works of law. That is, all Jews are cursed. Paul would not say that about himself.

Paul would not say that about Peter, Barnabas, the Jerusalem leadership, or all Jewish Christians. So, this is a reference to the two groups involved in the controversy in Galatia. So, I hope at this point you're really starting to feel the emphasis that I'm making on how it is that the range of arguments in Galatians has specific reference to the controversy in Galatia.

We have to move very, very carefully from some of these statements to make application or appropriation to contexts beyond Galatians. The underlying theology of the present evil age and new creation that Paul works with, I think, is transferable and powerful in a variety of contexts. But some of these statements are strategically ad hoc, that phrase that means to the situation.

And so, these arguments are made very, very strategically for the situation in Galatia. So, in verses 6-9, where Paul says that those of faith are blessed along with faithful Abraham. Even so, Abraham believed in God; this is a citation from Genesis, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Abraham is typically upheld in a range of Jewish texts from around the first-century era as the exemplary law observer, which is interesting because he, of course, comes sort of before the giving of the law, but he's upheld in the Jewish imagination as the person who rendered God obedience even before the law was given. And Paul, likewise, holds him up here as the exemplary faithful one. If there's a question in Galatia, this controversy between Paul and these Jewish missionaries, the question likely is something like, who are the group of people who are blessed in Abraham? Who is Abraham's family? And the Jewish missionaries have one answer: all those who are Jewish.

Paul has a different answer: everyone who is of the same faith as Abraham, whatever their ethnicity is. Verse 7 goes on, therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith who are children of Abraham, those who are of faith in Galatia. Now, that statement

is a bit more easily transferred beyond that situation, but Paul aims to target the group in Galatia who are resisting the pressure of the Jewish missionaries to Judaize.

Those are the group of people who are blessed. It is interesting here in verses 8 and 9, or I should say in verse 8, how Paul indicates the message to which Abraham originally responded because even the message that he responded to has relevance to the situation in Galatia. The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying that all nations would be blessed in you.

That is, all the Gentiles, all the nations will be blessed in you, not only the singular nation, Israel. So again, Paul is drawing upon a range of scriptural witnesses constantly to indicate that the exclusive, particularized gospel that the Jewish missionaries have brought simply doesn't resonate with scripture. There's just more going on, and it's an inadequate, unfaithful rendering of the scriptural message.

Paul concludes this portion of his argument that those who are of faith are blessed in verse 9, where he says, so then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the faithful one. So, the response to the gospel that God wants is not to adopt Jewish identity; it is to respond with faith or fidelity to Christ, which is embodied through acts of love, service, self-sacrifice, self-giving love, the fruit of the spirit, etc., as we'll see in the rest of Galatians. On the contrary, there's another group there, and the other group in Galatia is the group that is of the works of the law, as Paul says in verse 10, for as many as are of the works of the law.

Again, this is very particularly directed to the group there in Galatia that is teaching that in order to participate in the salvation of the God of Israel in Christ, a person must adopt Jewish identity, a person must become part of that group of people who are of the works of the law. This is not all Jews, and it is not all Israel, etc. The structure here of Galatians 3, 10-14 is really two arguments.

Verse 10 has its sort of corresponding part in verse 13, and then sandwiched between these are verse 11 and verse 12. And this is an argument, and they're really two sort of separate arguments. Each of these verses contains an assertion that Paul makes and then an Old Testament citation that he backs up.

Galatians 3:10-13 is subject to a variety of interpretations, which makes this a perennial battleground for issues having to do with Pauline theology. There is the traditional interpretation of verses 10 and 13, and this first argument in verses 10 and 13 has to do with the curse of the law. What in the world is Paul arguing when he argues with regard to the curse of the law? Well, according to what we might call a traditional interpretation, Paul is issuing a curse, a universal curse, on all sinners.

A curse on anybody and everybody who relies on their own performance for justification before God. This is sort of along the lines of an argument against legalism. And this interpretation is founded upon an implicit premise.

This implicit premise needs to be worked on. The implicit premise that is not stated here in Galatians 3, and is actually nowhere explicitly stated in Paul's letters, the implicit premise is that the law demands perfect obedience and that no human can render perfect obedience to God's law. This interpretation would be found among most Lutheran and Reformed interpreters.

It's a sort of universal way of reading this passage in most Reformed settings. And here's how it runs. You've got the assertion in the first part of verse 10 that Paul makes, and that assertion is this: for as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written.

And then Paul makes the citation. So, you've got the first part, verse 10a, the assertion, and then you've got verse 10b, the citation from Deuteronomy 27. Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them.

So, this interpretation sees in verse 10a a universal curse on everyone who attempts to be justified through obedience to the law, more or less legalistic kind of obedience. Then, the unstated premise is this, which is sort of found in the white space between verse 10a and verse 10b: the perfect obedience that could justify a person is impossible for humans. And then verse 10b for Scripture states, cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law in order to do them.

So, the way this theology works out is that there is a possibility out there for justification by legalism, assuming that any human being obeys God's law perfectly. So, if anybody renders to God perfect obedience, they could be justified. But since nobody can do that, God's law renders this universal curse on everybody.

And for the Christian gospel in this scenario, that's okay because verse 13 comes along, which is the second part of that argument, that Christ redeems believers from the curse that the law pronounces upon all sinful humanity. Well, I don't take that view because I do believe that there are some problems with it. First of all, the law, the Mosaic law rightly understood, as I said several lectures ago, the Mosaic law rightly understood never required perfect obedience.

The Mosaic law sort of assumes a scenario in which God already saves the people. He just grabs the people out of Egypt, delivers them, brings them into his love, situates them in the land, and then informs them, here's how you can walk in my love. And of

course, the Mosaic law has provisions for ongoing restoration and forgiveness and atonement based on the sacrificial system.

So, there's no assumption of perfect obedience or the expectation that anybody will perfectly obey it. That's not even really part of the arrangement. It's a misunderstanding of the Old Testament law.

Furthermore, because of that, Paul would need to prove that the Mosaic law demanded perfect obedience; since that would not be the assumption of the Jewish missionaries in Galatia, he would need to prove that there's no way that he can actually build an argument on that unstated premise. So, this is really a view that begs the question, that is to say, commits that logical fallacy of assuming as a conclusion what it actually needs to prove or assuming for proof what the conclusion that actually does need to prove. Actually, Martin Luther, in his Galatians commentary, recognized that on that scenario, the assertion that Paul makes in verse 10a and the scriptural proof in verse 10b are actually contradictory.

But he thought that the implied premise would satisfy that. I think that that interpretation just falls apart based on Old Testament theology and based on the rhetorical situation. Usually, if you're involved in a hot rhetorical debate, you need to argue toward your conclusions.

You can't just make assertions based on an assumed conclusion. That's not convincing. This is why I take another; well, let me just mention one other proposal.

This is the interpretation that Richard Hayes and N.T. Wright and a few others take. In verse 10b, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27 and 26. In this interpretation, there is the assumption that Paul intends to refer to all of Deuteronomy chapters 27 to 30.

So basically, when Paul cites Deuteronomy 27 and 26 in verse 10b, he is assuming the covenant curses. And what he's doing basically is saying, making the statement in verse 10b, that Israel is part of a covenantally cursed people. I should say Israel currently is a covenantally cursed people.

And anybody who is of the works of the law is under a curse because you're joining a covenantally cursed people. And why would you do that? The solution is to be in Christ, but this builds on the notion that Israel currently understood itself as in exile and that Paul is kind of building on top of that theology. I don't want to question that interpretation on the grounds of exile necessarily.

That's still a discussion that is ongoing, the extent to which Paul and other Jews of his era regarded the nation as still being in exile. I'm going to leave that alone for now. However, the quotation from Deuteronomy 27 and 26 is actually not from the portion of the text referring to the covenantal curses.

It's from a portion of text in Deuteronomy 27 that issues curses on a number of kinds of people who are sort of beyond the pale of redemption. These are the kinds of people who need to be put out of the covenant people of God because their transgressions and their high-handed sinning are so heinous that they need to be cursed by God. These people are worthy of death, and if they are not removed from the covenantal people, God's people themselves will be cursed.

This is a portion of the text that runs from Deuteronomy 27:15 through Deuteronomy 26. A number of these people are cursed. Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the Lord.

Cursed is the one who dishonors his father and mother. Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's boundary mark. Cursed is the one who misleads a blind person on the road.

These are individuals who need to be put out of the covenant people. The summary comes in verse 26 of people who simply refuse to be obedient to the Mosaic Law. Those people who will not confirm the words of this law by doing them are under a curse and need to be put out of the covenant people.

Paul quotes that summary statement in Galatians 3:10b. I think that the exile interpretation of this passage fails because Paul's quotation comes from a curse on individuals who will bring God's curse on the covenant people if they're not put out. I think that this passage, or I should say the first argument that runs from verse 10 through verse 13, or just includes verse 10 and verse 13, is a specifically ad hoc argument that runs along these lines. That runs along the lines that I suggested before with regard to Galatians 2:18 in the previous lecture.

That is to say, Paul is demonstrating the incoherence of the position of the Jewish missionaries because they are Jewish Christians who are participants in God's nationalistically and ethnically inclusive people and who are also arguing for an exclusive people of God. That's mutually exclusive. Those two positions are mutually exclusive.

They can't be held together. On the one hand, they are arguing, and I should say on the other hand, they make the Christian confession, which puts them among the nations. They are among God's people, among God's multi-ethnic people.

And on the other hand, they are claiming that only those who are of the works of law are of God's people. Basically, I'll just depict this once again visually. There's a sense in which they are claiming that you have to be within the Mosaic law.

And they also, by their confession, are out here where God is building this one new multi-national people of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. So, they find themselves out here while also making this confession that if anybody is out here, they are under a curse. To be faithful to the Mosaic law, you have to remain within it.

So, they are saying this, but they are also out here. That makes them lawbreakers, and that makes them people who are actually inviting upon themselves the curse of the law. Now, I think that in Paul's own mind, Paul also knows that the law does not actually have its power to curse because Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

Remember what I said the other day, that Paul, because he has been crucified with Christ, he is a dead man, which basically evacuates the power of the Mosaic law to curse him. Now, I think, again, he also understands that there is a misunderstanding of the Mosaic law to imagine that you cannot have any relationship with Gentiles. But even if he is assuming the misunderstanding of the Mosaic law on the part of these Jewish Christian missionaries, on their own understanding, they are bearing the curse of the law.

They are transgressors, a problem they don't actually need to worry about because, again, Christ has redeemed them from the curse of the law. So, the argument that Paul makes here is this. Everyone in Galatia who is of the works of the law is under the law's curse because the law pronounces a curse upon everyone who does not remain within the Mosaic law.

So, you have an incoherent position, you Jewish Christian missionaries, and you Galatians who are submitting to that teaching. The reason I take this interpretation is because it's consistent with the Deuteronomy 27-26 text, where Moses issues a curse upon anybody who does not confirm the words of the book of the law to do them. It's consistent with that.

It also makes good sense in light of Paul's argument in Galatians 2-18, as I mentioned. And, of course, the solution to this is, like I said in verse 13, where Christ has already borne the curse of the law. All those who are in Christ are already dead, so this is not actually a problem.

So, if we do sort of theologize based on what Paul is doing here, I don't think it's right to imagine that all of humanity is under God's curse. I don't think it's appropriate to say that all humanity is under the curse of the law. The reason I say that is because the Mosaic Law is given specifically as sort of a national charter, scripture, and God's word, and constitutes one nation, that is, Israel.

Gentiles were not under the Mosaic Law, so it's not appropriate to talk about the curse of the law. That's not an appropriate way to understand sort of non-Christian

people nowadays. I know at times a gospel presentation is sometimes given in terms of sinners or non-Christians bearing the curse of the law and how to escape that in Christ.

This is an argument that Paul marshals that has specific relevance to the situation in Galatia, and I find it interesting he never uses it elsewhere. Alright, so that's the first argument in verses 10 and 13. Your doctrine is incoherent, it's mutually incompatible, it needs to be abandoned, and basically, the problem that you think you have is not actually a problem because of what Christ has done for Jewish Christians.

The second argument is made here in verses 11 and 12. And again, traditionally, these two verses, each consisting of an assertion that Paul makes, backed up by an Old Testament text, these two verses are typically regarded as speaking of the alternative dynamics of faith in Christ on the one hand and the Mosaic Law on the other. So, verse 12 is typically read to say that justification is not by law or by legalism because the righteous person will live by faith, or a just person will live by faith.

So, not by law, but by faith. And then verse 12 is typically regarded as saying something like, and the law is not of faith, on the contrary, the law and faith have two totally different dynamics. The law has to do with doing, faith has to do with believing.

So, just a contrast between doing and being, or doing and believing, or action and internal attitude. Again, there are some problems with that traditional rendering, especially because the law commends faith. The law was given to Israel to generate a kind of faith posture towards God.

It actually has to do with faith, so why would Paul say this? Furthermore, Paul nowhere ever endorses passivity. He actually issues commands in his letters, gives exhortations, and sees the life of faith as one of active responsiveness to God. I think that Paul is doing something slightly different here.

I read verse 11 in this way, and I actually agree here with Hayes, Bruce Longenecker in his book, *The Triumph of Abraham's God*, a great book on Galatians, and N.T. Wright, who calls for the slight repunctuation of verse 11, says that it should read like this. Now, because no one is justified by the law before God, it is obvious that the righteous man will live by faith. Many recent commentators also call for the repunctuation or just the retranslating of that passage.

And then verse 12, and the law is not from faith or faithfulness. On the contrary, he who practices them will live by them. And I think that what Paul is saying here in verse 11 is something along these lines.

Now, because no one is justified by the adoption of Jewish identity, it is obvious that the righteous man will live by faith, because the two options are adopting Jewish identity, there in Galatia, or faith or faithfulness. And I think that in verses 11 and 12, when Paul mentions the law, he is not speaking about the Mosaic law in the abstract. He is speaking very specifically about the pressure being brought to bear by the Jewish Christian missionaries on the non-Jewish Christians there in Galatia to adopt the Mosaic law, that is, to become Jewish by being circumcised.

Hans Dieter Betzen's commentary on Galatians says that analyzing the rhetoric of Galatians, there are loads of terms that Paul uses in this letter that are shorthand for larger concepts. And I think that in verses 11 and 12 when he uses just those terms, the law, or that expression, the law, he is talking about the up-and-running situation in Galatia where the Jewish Christian missionaries are trying to persuade the non-Jewish Christians to Judaize. That is how I read this statement that Paul makes in verse 12, and the law is not from faith.

In my opinion, and I am not alone in this, Paul, as a first-century Jew committed to scripture, loving God's law, the Torah, would not denigrate Torah by saying it has nothing to do with faith. I think he is saying, for you Galatians, for you to adopt law, that is to become Jewish, to be circumcised, for you the law is not the faithful way. For you the faithful way is to render to God faith, and to live lives of self-sacrificial love for one another, which is the embodiment of faith.

So again, falling back on the rhetorical situation, Paul uses the law here, which stands in for the pressure being brought to bear. An analogy I typically use at this point, or that I think of is to illustrate what I mean when I say that Paul's rhetoric here is rhetoric he would not reproduce elsewhere. He would never say in the abstract, by the way, that the Mosaic Law is not a faith.

It is possible to say things in a rhetorically strategic situation that you would not otherwise say. What I mean is this. I'll give you this example.

I have two sons. My older son is Jake, and my younger son is Riley. And to my older son, before I had kids, I dreamt someday of having sons, because I love sports, and I just thought, I can't wait to play sports with my sons, I can't wait to watch sports with my sons, and pass on to them my love for baseball and basketball and golf and football.

As it turned out, my attempts at passing on my love of sports to my older son completely failed. He had no interest in playing basketball, baseball, football, or golf. But he developed a love for music, arts, and especially skateboarding.

And there was one day, he's also just an incredibly bright young man, now man, but one day when he was about 11 or 12, I was putting him to bed, and I would always climb into bed with my boys and chat with them about our day, and we would laugh about stuff, talk about our day, and one night I was climbing down from Jake's bunk bed, he slept on the top bunk, and he leaned over his bunk and he just said to me, Dad, do you support me being a skater? And most nights I am pretty just, you know, vacant mentally, but it was one of those moments where I caught on to what he was saying. And I said, Jake, do you mean, am I cool with you, am I cool with you being a skater, which is not what I would choose for you, and am I cool with you not loving baseball and basketball and football the way that I do? And he said, yeah, do you support me being a skater? And I'm so thankful I was mentally alert at that moment, and I used to drive him to skate parks. And I said, Jake, I love that you're a skater.

I love the day that I first saw you drop in on a half-pipe. And I named all these tricks that I saw him do, and I told him how much I'm so proud of him for, you know, when he goes skating with his friends and to see him in action and when he draws and his love for music and he taught himself the guitar. And I am just thrilled with him over the things that he loves, knowing these are not the things I love, but whatever.

Because what matters is he's my son. In that moment, what if I were to say also, and I didn't say this. What if, at that moment, I had said something like this to Jake? Jake, I love that you're a skater. I don't care about baseball.

It's just a stupid game. Who cares about golf? It's just a dumb game. Baseball, it doesn't even matter.

Who cares about baseball? It just involves a dumb ball and throwing it around. You know, it's a game. It does not matter.

I don't care a bit about baseball. What I care about is you. Now, what if, at that moment, my other son, Riley, was listening in, whom I coached his baseball team for six years?

And we used to go to baseball games together. We used to go to minor-league baseball games together. I'd tell him, get your friends together.

We're going to see a single-A baseball team. Riley and I developed a closeness over baseball. And what if he heard me talking about how I don't even care about this dumb game? That would probably generate some confusion for him.

Dad, you told me you love baseball. So, do you see how it's possible to speak in certain ways? I don't care about baseball; it's possible to speak in ways that do not reflect the abstract understanding of a person. Because if you had asked me about

my love for baseball, I could go on at length about the particularities of what I love about baseball.

In the same way, here, when Paul says that the law is not of faith and that the law justifies no one before God, he is speaking not about the Mosaic Law in itself, but he is using the term, the expression, the law, to stand in for the pressure being put on the non-Jewish Christians that they need to adopt the law, that is to say, they need to take on Jewish identity, be circumcised, and begin to follow the law of Moses the way that Jews actually do. So, the law does not refer to the Mosaic Law in itself but to the choice facing the Galatians. And the second argument that Paul makes here in verses 11 and 12 is to say the law, that is to say, the adoption of Jewish identity, is not the faithful way.

Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 here in verse 12, he who practices them shall live by them. That is not a way for Paul to say the person who does the Mosaic Law could actually be justified by the Mosaic Law. He's not saying that necessarily.

This is a quote from Leviticus 18.5, which is used several times throughout the Old Testament, and even in its original context, it's a way of stressing that the person who rightly responds to God will be blessed. And what he means to say is in Galatia, the way of rightly responding to God is to keep pursuing the way of faith, not to actually revert, or I should say, not to choose the path of adopting the Mosaic Law as an identity marker. So, this way of reading verses 11 and 12, this way of reading Galatians 3.10 to 13, makes the Mosaic Law, if we think in terms of Biblical theology, it makes the Mosaic Law consistent with the gospel that calls for *pistis*, or faith, or faithfulness.

Because the law always called for a faithful response, that's what Jesus preached when he came in his ministry, and that's, of course, what Paul is advocating in his ministry. It also removes the contrast between the law and faith, which a number of Biblical theologies sort of saddle with that contrast. We have to somehow justify how it is that the Mosaic Law does what it does, and the New Testament does what it does in calling for faith.

It also removes that contrast between doing and believing that is not an appropriate way to read the New Testament gospel as if it no longer calls for doing. It does call for doing. But the kind of doing that is a life-giving mode of behaving, including internal attitudes and external behaviors.

Alright, moving on in Galatians 3, we get to verse 14, and Paul notes that, actually, with regard to the conclusion to the curse of the law issue, he mentions in verse 14 that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, by which I take Paul meaning Jewish Christians, not inclusive of Gentile Christians. But Christ has redeemed us, that is, you, Peter, you Jewish Christians, me, Paul, not the Gentiles, but the Jews

have been redeemed from the curse of the law so that they could join with the multi-ethnic people of God, this new family that God is building in Christ. So, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law because it became a curse for us, that is, Jewish Christians.

In verse 14, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. And I think that Paul is actually talking about both groups there in verse 14. That is to say, in order that, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in the death of Christ, the blessing of Abraham has been poured out on Gentiles first and then secondarily so that we, Jewish Christians, might receive the promise of the Spirit, that is to say, that was a promise given to Israel that the Spirit would be poured out on them, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

So, in the redemptive work of Christ, the blessing of Abraham has come upon the nations, that is, the Gentiles and Jewish Christians in this one multi-ethnic family. The blessing of Abraham has been poured out here. So, who are the children of Abraham? All Jews, all Gentiles who are in Christ.

And to be among that group that advocates for an exclusivist gospel or an exclusively Jewish people of God is to be now cut off from the place where Christ is, where the Spirit is, where the blessing of Abraham is being poured out. That's an argument that Paul is going to make later in Galatians, which we'll get to in due course. So, to conclude verses 6-14, Paul issues a blessing on all those who are of faith, whether Jew or Gentile and a curse upon all those who are of the works of the law, that is to say, the teaching.

Those who are of the party there in Galatia, who are of that teaching, that you have to be part of that exclusive group in order to be genuinely saved. All right, let's move to the number of arguments that Paul makes here in the rest of Galatians 3:15-29. And Paul is now going to seek to relate the promise of Abraham; I should say the promise to Abraham and the Mosaic Law.

Here, I'm going to erase part of this and create another diagram. I find it helpful to sort of draw some of these arguments that Paul makes, especially when relating the Mosaic Law and the Abrahamic Covenant, because Paul is working with just large swaths of histories, salvation histories, as it's working out. So, in verses 15 and following, he's going to relate the promise to Abraham and the Mosaic Law.

And the first argument he makes here, in verses 15 and following, is that the law serves the promise to Abraham. The Mosaic Law is sort of a true understanding, or a proper understanding, of how the Mosaic Law relates to the promise given to Abraham. And Paul's strategy here is going to be to sort of widen the distance between the promise to Abraham and the Mosaic Law.

Because the agitators, or the teachers there in Galatia, have brought them together. To be a part of Abraham's family, you've got to be rightly related to the Mosaic Law. That is, you have to be among the ethnic group that the Mosaic Law creates, Israel.

Otherwise, you can't be part of the Abrahamic Covenant. But Paul is bringing those apart. The Abrahamic Promise does something different than what the Mosaic Law does.

In verse 15, he states this basic principle that once a covenant is established, it can't be changed, which is just sort of a basic legal principle. In verse 16, he says that God's promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. He makes this kind of radical argument by saying that God does not say, and to seeds, referring to many, but rather to one and to your seed, which Paul interprets here as Christ.

Very interesting. So, if we sort of draw this out, we should keep this one diagram up because this is going to be important here. So, God makes this promise to Abraham, but really, in making to Abraham and to his seed, he is making the promise to Christ.

Very interesting. So, you've got God making a promise to Abraham and his seed, who is Christ. So, God makes a promise to Christ.

The law comes in later. Verse 17, the law comes in 430 years later, and it is not going to invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God. So, the Mosaic Covenant, which comes in later, I mean, this is sort of a way of Paul, I don't want to say he speaks derogatorily about the Mosaic Law, but this is kind of a downplaying, or at least a situating, a minimizing, to some extent, of the Mosaic Law in the larger program of God to bring about blessing in Christ.

So, the Mosaic Law comes much later. And it is a separate thing. It's not coextensive with the Abrahamic promise.

It's doing a separate job. As it kind of makes its way through time, it's going to do something different. And it does not nullify the promise, for if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise.

But God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. So, they're actually doing very different kinds of things. This is promissory, and it never loses that character.

This has a different character altogether. So, verse 19, why then the law? Why did the law ever even come about? Paul gives four answers here, or four reasons why the law was brought about. First of all, it was added in verse 19 because of transgressions, which Paul does not elaborate on, so this is sort of a, we have to interpret this.

I don't think that this means that the law was given in order to provoke sins or transgressions. I don't think it was given to necessarily identify transgressions. I think that's a reading of the Mosaic Law through the lens of a narrow, individualistic soteriology.

I think because Paul is talking about kind of the large sweep of salvation history here, I think what Paul means to say, because of what he's about to say at the end of this list of four things, that the law was given to keep the people distinct and to keep them from dissipating through disobedience and transgression. Paul's argument is this: The Mosaic Law was sort of given to call into being a distinct people that would remain distinct through time, and would eventually produce the Messiah, the seed, okay? Because of transgressions, I think indicates that this was given, the Mosaic Law was given to just maintain a cohesive people, instead of them just kind of falling apart and failing to produce Jesus Christ.

So, first of all, because of transgressions. Secondly, Paul says it was ordained by angels. According to Jewish tradition, the law was given, sort of to highlight the glory of the giving of the law.

Jewish tradition talks about the attendance of angels in the giving of the law. But here, this is sort of a way of Paul's indication that the law has something more of the character of mediation. God gives it through these angels, although that's sort of pushing the Jewish tradition a little bit beyond what it itself would have said.

Also, it involves a mediator, that is, Moses, at the end of verse 19. It comes by the agency of a mediator, and then finally, it comes until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. So, there's a sense in which there's a temporary limitation to the Mosaic Law.

So, the law serves the Abrahamic promise by helping to kind of bring it about, and once this is complete, there's a temporal limitation to the Mosaic Law, which I think raises a lot of other theological questions about Jewish identity. I won't get into those. In verse 19, Paul says, now a mediator is not for one party only, and then the NASB adds party only because Paul's statement is simply, now a mediator is not for one, whereas God is one, which is a very, very interesting, very cryptic statement.

This is that famous verse about which apparently there are some 400 interpretations. I haven't gone through all those. I'll depend on other commentators.

But I think what Paul's saying here is simply this. This is a way of not denigrating the Mosaic Law but highlighting the promise. The Mosaic Law was given through a mediator, that is Moses.

Paul also said that it was given through the mediation of angels. And then he turns to say in verse 20, Now a mediator is not for one. A mediator is not for one, whereas God is one.

So, building on the Shema, the great confession of faith of Israel's faith, I think what Paul's saying here is this. The Mosaic Law arrangement involves mediation. According to the Mosaic Law, if you are related to God by virtue of having Jewish identity, you are related to God through the mediation of Moses.

If, on the other hand, you are related to God by virtue of being in Christ, you are immediately related to God. There's an intimacy there. Because, remember, God is one.

What he's saying is that God made his promises to Christ. And because Christ is God, God makes, this is a within-God promise. God makes promises to himself, in a sense.

And if you are wrapped up in Christ, you are related to God immediately. There's no mediation. You are in God by virtue of your in Christ situation.

If you know God by virtue of your Jewish identity, there's mediation there. And that's Moses or the Mosaic Law. So, very subtle little hint there.

But, again, Paul's being cryptic here. I think one of the things to keep in mind with regard to this very cryptic interpretive battle going on here, or I should say with regard to the cryptic statements in Galatians 3 and 4, keep in mind that Paul is arguing with fellow advanced Pharisaic Old Testament scholars who are in Christ, like himself. So, he's just firing away with these arguments, knowing that they're going to hit.

I kind of wonder if the Galatian Gentiles would have gotten any of this without necessarily having to explain it to them. So, the law and the promise, verse 21, are competing. Or should I say, they're not competing.

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Because they're separate. Is the Mosaic Law somehow against this? Not at all. May it never be.

For if the law had been given, which was able to impart life, then righteousness would have been based on law. What Paul is saying here, basically, is the Mosaic Law, that was never the job of the Mosaic Law to give life. And what Paul is thinking here, I think, is the promise to Abraham, which was given to, remember, Paul develops this in Romans, it was given to Abraham whose loins were dead and whose wife's womb was as good as dead.

I mean, the promise is able to generate life. A miraculous child where there was a 90-year-old wife and a 100-year-old man. But he's also thinking long-term of the new creation brought about by the death of Christ.

That was never the Mosaic Law's job. The Mosaic Law had a different job to play in the plan of God. So, they're not contrary. They just have different jobs.

The law was never intended to bring about that kind of life, even though the law, of course, is still Scripture. On the other hand, in verse 22, Scripture has shut up all men under sin so that the promise by faith in Christ Jesus may be given to all those who believe. So, Scripture, the Mosaic Law as Scripture, does bear testimony to the need of all those who are shut up under sin to be saved.

It is just not the mechanism whereby God brings about eschatological life. That comes about by promise. So, the final argument that Paul makes here in verses 23 and following just sort of explains the rest of this covenantal arrangement.

That is, he talks about how the law was a temporary measure. He says, but before faith came, which I take to mean the faithfulness before Christ; this is a stand-in term to talk about before Jesus himself came, the faithfulness because there was faith before the arrival of Jesus. So, before Christ came, Jews were kept in custody under the law, being shut up or being sort of kept together but closed off from the faith, which was later to be revealed.

So, the law has become our tutor until Christ. And I just bemoan some of the translations. You'll notice in the NASB translation that it has to lead us to in italics because it was not the case that the law was given in order to drive people to Christ, sort of a Lutheran interpretation, or to sort of beat down people to drive them to Christ.

This is just a temporal statement that can be translated until. The law was given to sort of bring the Jewish people together through time and lead them on, holding them together as a distinct people until Christ arrived so that they could be delivered into this new reality called the in-Christ reality. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Verse 25. These are statements for Jewish Christians exclusively, not having to do with Gentiles. So, not to say that the Mosaic Law is not abidingly important for Jewish Christians, but just to say with regard to that confining function, the Mosaic Law no longer performs for Jews who are in Christ that confining function.

Because remember, you've got this arrangement over here where Jews who are in Christ are now set alongside this one new family in Christ that is multi-ethnic. That confining function is no longer playing a role—verse 26.

Now Paul moves to talk to all his audience who is in Christ, for you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

This new reality in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, ethnicity is irrelevant, circumcised, uncircumcised, Jew, Gentile, all of that is just off the radar with regard to defining who is part of God's one new family. None of that matters. Neither slave nor free person, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring. You are Abraham's seed, more specifically, and you are heirs according to promise. So, that is to say, all those who are of the Mosaic law historically, that is, Jews, who are now in Christ, are part of Abraham's new family, but all Gentiles who are in Christ are also part of Abraham's family. So, Jews and Gentiles all participated together in the blessing of Abraham, and they were all heirs according to the promise.

So that brings us to the end of Galatians 3, but just to say, Paul's arguments here are tangled. His arguments are covenantal; they involve a relationship between the Abrahamic promise and Mosaic law, and they involve aspects of Deuteronomy ranging into Leviticus, including that statement from Habakkuk 2.4 in Galatians 3.11. But again, Paul is issuing these arguments to Jewish Christians who probably would be grasping what he was saying. They may not have agreed, but Paul wants to convince these Gentile Christians not to Judaize, but he's also speaking to that second audience, these Jewish Christian missionaries, trying to basically bring them along and warn them off of trying to put pressure on these Gentiles to Judaize.

But there's no doubt that Galatians 3 is complicated stuff.