
Primary Argument: Why Gentiles Are Not Required to Keep the Law

§ 1 • Those Who Believe In Jesus—Not Those Who Obey the Law—Are The Heirs of the Life Promised to Abraham

§ 1.1 • Being In Jesus by Reason of Belief Defines the Child of Abraham Who Will Receive the Promise of Life—Whether Jew or Gentile

PART 7

12 Just as Abraham “**believed** God and it was credited to him, resulting in *dikaioisune*,”¹ so then, you should understand that those who look to find acceptance by reason of their belief, these are the sons of Abraham.² 2•Now the Scripture, foreseeing that God would decree the Gentiles *dikaiois* by reason of their belief, announced the good news to Abraham in advance, saying, “*In you all the peoples will be blessed*”³—the upshot being that those who look to find acceptance by reason of their belief are blessed with the believing Abraham.⁴

3:6–9

13 Now however many there are who look to find acceptance by reason of their doing what the Covenant requires are under a curse.⁵ 2•Indeed, it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things written in the book of the Covenant to do them.*”⁶ 3•Now, that no one is decreed *dikaiois* in the presence of God on the basis of the Covenant is evident, because “*The one who is dikaiois by reason of his belief shall attain Life.*”⁷ (4•Yet, the Covenant is not excluded by belief; rather, “*The man who does these things shall attain Life by them.*”⁸) 5•When he became the curse on our behalf, the *messiah* bought us our freedom from the curse presupposed by the Covenant. (6•Indeed, it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.*”⁹) 7•As a result, the blessing of Abraham comes to Gentiles *who are in Messiah Jesus*. 8•As a result, we receive the Spirit’s promise *through our belief*.

3:10–14

§ 1.2 • The Blessing of Abraham Promised To Those Who Are In Jesus Is Not Superseded by the Mosaic Covenant

PART 8

14 Brothers, I speak as a man—no one sets aside or adds to a covenant that has been ratified, even though it is of man. 2•Now the promises were promised to Abraham and to his seed.

1. *Genesis* 15:6.

2. Literally, “that the by-reason-of-belief ones, these are sons of Abraham.”

3. *Genesis* 12:3.

4. Literally, “that the by-reason-of-belief ones are blessed with the believing Abraham.”

5. Literally, “Now as many as are the by-reason-of-works-of-*nomos* ones are under a curse.”

6. *Deuteronomy* 27:26.

7. *Habakkuk* 2:4.

8. *Leviticus* 18:5 (loosely). See also *Ezekiel* 18:1–32, and *Ezekiel* 33:10–20.

9. *Deuteronomy* 21:23.

3•It does not say, “and to his seeds,” as to many. 4•Rather, it was as to one—“and to your seed.”¹⁰ 5•This one seed is the *messiah*.

3:15–16

- 15 Here is what I am saying: the Law,¹¹ which came into existence four hundred and thirty years later, does not negate a covenant established earlier by God such that it nullifies the promise. 2•But if the inheritance is derived from the Mosaic Covenant, then no longer is it derived from the promise. But God granted it to Abraham by way of the promise.

3:17–18

§ 1.3 • The Mosaic Covenant Had A Temporary Role And Was Never Intended to Be the Ultimate Determiner of Who Would Receive Life

PART 9

- 16 Why the Mosaic Covenant then? 2•It was added because of our transgressions, having been ordained through *angeloi* at the hand of a mediator until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. (3•So the mediator is not for the one seed.) 4•But God is one. 5•So is the Covenant in conflict with the promises of God? 6•No, of course not!

3:19–21a

- 17 Now if a covenant that was able to impart Life had been given, then *dikaioisune* would indeed be by reason of that Covenant. 2•But, instead, the Scripture¹² has classed all under sin categorically, to the end that the promise might—by reason of their belief in Jesus, the *messiah*—be given to those who believe.

3:21b–22

- 18 But before this belief came, we were put in protective custody under the Covenant, confined for the belief that was about to be unveiled. 2•Therefore, the Covenant has been our caretaker up to the time of the *messiah*, to the end that we might be decreed *dikaiois* by reason

10. This is not a direct citation of any particular statement in the Scripture. Paul is offering this “statement” of God’s promise simply as a way to capture the gist of what it is that God had promised Abraham. God promised Abraham that he was going to bless Abraham and his seed. However, God never intended his promise to be a promise made to anyone and everyone who could trace his line of descent back to Abraham. Rather, God had one specific line of descent in mind—or, more accurately, he had one specific connection to Abraham in mind—as the thing that would qualify a person to share in Abraham’s blessing. What was that “connection”? It was to be akin to Abraham in one’s openness and receptivity to God and his promises. A person who shared Abraham’s openness to believing God was a member of the one “seed” of Abraham that was destined to be blessed with the blessing promised to Abraham.

11. Here I use ‘Law’ to translate *nomos* in order to make it clear that it is a different word from *diatheke* (covenant) in this same sentence. Nevertheless, *nomos* is being used to denote the Covenant that God made with Israel in the time of Moses.

12. Here Paul uses ‘Scripture’ as a synonym for ‘Covenant.’ It can serve as a synonym for ‘Covenant’ because Paul and his contemporaries have access to the terms of the Covenant only in and through what was recorded in the Scriptures. So far as Paul and his contemporaries are concerned, the Covenant is found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures include more than just the Covenant. But Paul uses ‘Scripture’ here to denote the portion of them that contain the Mosaic Covenant.

HANDOUT 6

An Analysis

of the

Arguments in Galatians 3:6–14

1. *Galatians* 3:6–9 > Argument from Scripture **in favor of** the view that *belief* is the condition that qualifies a person for eternal Life.
 - a. *Galatians* 3:6–7 > First Scriptural evidence in support of the view that *belief* is the condition for receiving eternal Life—*Genesis* 15:6.
 - A. Unstated argument for how *Genesis* 15:6 (in the context of everything else that can be known about Abraham from *Genesis*) supports his point:
 - (1) Step one: *Genesis* 15:6 asserts that Abraham found acceptance by God because he gave evidence that he possessed an inward openness and receptivity to God that led to his believing the truth about God, his purposes, and his promises.

★ =Abraham found acceptance by God by reason of his belief.
 - (2) Step two: In the context of the entire account about Abraham in *Genesis*, his acceptance by God was a prerequisite to Abraham being blessed with the blessing that God had promised him.

★ =Abraham’s blessing was conditioned on his being accepted by God.
 - (a) NOTE: in the light of the first portion of *Genesis*, it stands to reason that the “blessing” being promised to Abraham is the antithesis to the curse that lies upon each and every human being—every son of Adam. Namely, it is the antithesis to DEATH (the final destruction and annihilation of one’s identity). In other words, the blessing promised to Abraham is life beyond the grave—*aionic* Life (eternal Life).
 - (3) Step three: *Genesis* 12:1–3 promises a blessing to others who, within the purposes of God, are deemed to belong to Abraham. In other words, it promises the same blessing to individuals who are deemed to be members of his family, individuals who are “sons of Abraham.”

★ =Abraham’s blessing was promised to the sons of Abraham as well.
 - (4) Step four: It stands to reason that a “son of Abraham”—that is, one who is promised the same blessing as Abraham—will find the same acceptance by God as Abraham did and will find it on the same terms as Abraham did. Specifically, a “son of Abraham” will find acceptance by an inward openness and receptivity to

God that results in his believing the truth about God, his purposes, and his promises.

★ = **Abraham’s son will find acceptance just as Abraham did—by his belief.**

- (5) Step five: The explicit belief that demonstrated that Abraham possessed an inward openness and receptivity to God, his purposes, and his promises was his belief that God would grant him a son, Isaac. Alternatively, the explicit belief that will demonstrate that a contemporary of Paul possesses an inward openness and receptivity to God, his purposes, and his promises is his belief that Jesus is God’s Messiah and his belief in the “gospel” message that the Messiah proclaimed.

★ = **Abraham’s qualifying belief was that he would have an heir; a “son” of Abraham’s qualifying belief is that Jesus is the Messiah and his message is the Truth.**

- (6) Step six: Therefore, it follows that it is those who believe that Jesus is God’s Messiah and that his message is the Truth who are the sons of Abraham.

★ = **A son of Abraham is one who believes that Jesus is Messiah and believes his gospel message.**

- b. *Galatians* 3:8–9 > Second Scriptural evidence in support of the view that *belief* is the condition for receiving eternal Life—*Genesis* 12:1–3.

A. Unstated argument for how *Genesis* 12:1–3 supports his point:

- (1) Step one: In *Genesis* 12:3 God promises that “all the people-groups [nations]” will be blessed with the same blessing that God is promising to Abraham.

★ = **Blessing of Abraham will come to individuals from every people group.**

- (2) Step two: According to *Genesis* 12:3, what qualifies another individual to receive this blessing is the fact that he belongs to Abraham, that is, that he is “in” Abraham.

★ = **Blessing of Abraham will be granted to anyone who is “in” Abraham.**

- (3) Step three: It stands to reason that being “in” Abraham is a way of describing a family-like connection to Abraham. To be “in” Abraham is to be in his line of descent; it is to be his “child.”

★ = **Blessing of Abraham will be granted to anyone who is a child of Abraham.**

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- (4) Step four: *Genesis* 12:3 contradicts itself if the family-like connection that is in view is a literal, biological family connection, for, in effect, the promise to Abraham in *Genesis* 12:3 comes to this: by being a member of your family, all the people who are not members of your family will be blessed. This can only make sense if being a member of Abraham’s family is a metaphorical description of some other kind of connection to Abraham and not a literal description of biological descent.

★ = **The child of Abraham who will be blessed is one who is metaphorically Abraham’s child, not one who is a literal biological descendent of Abraham.**

- (5) Step five: It stands to reason that the connection to Abraham that makes an individual to be metaphorically his child (that is, to be “in him”) is having the very same inward openness and receptivity to God that Abraham had—an inward openness that results in believing the truth about God, his purposes, and his promises.

★ = **The child of Abraham who will be blessed is one who shares with Abraham the same inward orientation toward God that results in a willingness to believe God.**

- (6) Step six: It follows from the above that Gentiles—those who are not biologically nor ethnically descended from Abraham—can be “in” Abraham, and hence his metaphorical “children.”

★ = **It follows that Gentiles can be metaphorical children.**

- (7) Step seven: It follows, therefore, that Gentiles can receive the same blessing as Abraham.

★ = **It follows that Gentiles can be granted the blessing of Abraham.**

- (8) Step eight: It follows from the above—in conjunction with *Galatians* 3:6–7 and *Genesis* 15:6—that Gentiles receive the same blessing as Abraham because they find acceptance by God on the condition of their belief that Jesus is God’s Messiah.

★ = **It follows that Gentiles can receive the blessing of Abraham by reason of their belief in Jesus.**

2. *Galatians* 3:10–14 > Argument from Scripture **in favor of** the view that a person’s **connection to the Messiah** is the condition that qualifies him for eternal Life.

- a. *Galatians* 3:10 > Step one: According to *Deuteronomy* 27:26, a Law-keeper—withstanding his Law-obedience—stands condemned and worthy of death, and he will escape

destruction (the curse) only by the mercy of God. His Law-keeping does not make him worthy of the blessing of Life in the eyes of God.

★ = Every human being is inherently under a curse.

A. Unstated reasoning behind how *Deuteronomy* 27:26 supports his point:

(1) *Deuteronomy* 27:26 is ambiguous. Is failing to do what the Law commands the *cause* of being under a curse? (That is, is being cursed the punishment for not doing what the Law demands?) Or, is failing to do what the Law commands a matter of failing to avail oneself of the divinely provided rescue from the curse that one is already under? Paul interprets *Deuteronomy* 27:26 in the latter of these two ways, not in the former. Accordingly, in the light of *Deuteronomy* 27:26, the one who does what the Law commands is nevertheless under a curse unless God grants him mercy in response to his Law-obedience.

(a) NOTE OF EXPLANATION: Since every human being is under the curse, no individual can *earn* the blessing of eternal Life, nor render himself *deserving* of it, by doing what the Law commands. The best any human being can do is this: by doing what the Law commands, he can meet the condition that God has placed on receiving divine mercy and can thereby qualify himself to receive eternal Life as an undeserved gift of God’s mercy.

(b) Reasoning behind Paul’s interpretive decision with regard to *Deuteronomy* 27:26:

(A) In light of the very first accounts recorded in the Scriptures, it should be clear that mankind is inherently under a curse (that is, inherently damnable). From *Genesis* forward, it becomes clear that every human being is under the curse of DEATH by virtue of the fact that he is a child of Adam—that is, by virtue of the simple fact that he is a human being. No natural-born human being deserves to be granted Life after the grave.

(B) Hence, when Moses is giving Israel the covenant in *Deuteronomy* 27:26 and elsewhere, it makes no sense to interpret God’s covenant as God coming to a morally unblemished and not-yet-morally-defined people and laying down the terms upon which they can prove themselves good, worthy, and deserving of Life after the grave. Rather, in the light of earlier Scriptures, it makes more sense to interpret the Mosaic Covenant as God offering mercy to a people who are under the curse and are deserving of death and destruction. In other words, God is saying this: if you obey the Law, he will not give you the death and destruction that you deserve; he will give you the Life and blessing that you do not deserve.

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- b. *Galatians* 3:11 > Step two: According to *Habakkuk* 2:4, no one will be deemed *dikaios* (and mercifully granted Life) on the basis of Law-obedience.

★ = Freedom from the curse is NOT granted on the basis of Law-obedience.

A. Unstated argument for how *Habakkuk* 2:4 supports this point:

- (1) *Habakkuk* explicitly states that the individual who will attain Life (and escape destruction) is the individual who is *dikaios* because he has met the condition of his evidencing *belief*.
 - (2) In light of the fact that *Habakkuk* is addressing Jews who are subject to the Mosaic Covenant, it is meaningful and significant that he does not state that the individual who will attain Life (and escape destruction) is the individual who is *dikaios* because he has met the condition of obeying the Law. This strongly suggests that Law-obedience is neither the ultimate condition, nor an absolutely necessary condition, for attaining *dikaiosune*.
 - (3) If Law-obedience is not an absolutely necessary condition for attaining *dikaiosune*, then it follows directly that Law-obedience cannot be the *basis* upon which *dikaiosune* is granted to an individual.
 - (a) The basis for *dikaiosune* (or anything) would necessarily serve as an absolutely necessary condition for it.
 - (b) It follows, therefore, that if something is NOT an absolutely necessary condition for *dikaiosune*, then it is NOT the basis for *dikaiosune*.
 - (4) Therefore, no one will be deemed *dikaios* (and granted Life) on the basis of Law-obedience.
- c. *Galatians* 3:12 > Disclaimer to step two: According to *Leviticus* 18:5, it is not the case that Law-keeping can never qualify a person for the divine mercy he needs in order to escape destruction (the curse) and attain Life; but it will do so only insofar as his Law-obedience is a manifestation of *belief*.

★ = Freedom from the curse CAN BE granted on the basis of Law-obedience, if and when Law-obedience is a manifestation of BELIEF.

A. Unstated reasoning for how *Leviticus* 18:5 supports his point:

- (1) In the light of *Habakkuk* 2:4 (*Galatians* 3:11), we can see that Law-obedience is not an absolutely necessary condition for being granted mercy and the blessing of Life; for one can be granted mercy and the blessing of Life merely on the condition of his evidencing belief.

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- (2) And in the light of *Galatians* 3:6–9, it is also the case that Law-obedience is not a sufficient condition for being granted mercy and the blessing of Life; for one must evidence belief in order to be granted mercy and the blessing of Life.
- (3) However, a straightforward inference from *Leviticus* 18:5 (in its larger context) is that—in the context of the Covenant between God and Israel—God DOES deem Law-obedience to be a necessary and sufficient condition for being granted mercy and the blessing of Life.
- (4) It stands to reason, therefore, that—in the context of the Covenant between God and Israel—an individual’s Law-obedience can and will qualify a person for divine mercy and Life if, and only if, his Law-obedience is an expression of inward **belief**.
- (5) Hence, this follows: it is *not* the case that Law-obedience can *never* qualify a person for the divine mercy he needs to escape destruction and attain Life. Law-obedience can qualify a person for divine mercy under the following two conditions: (i) one’s Law-obedience is the manifestation of an inward belief, and (ii) one’s Law-obedience occurs in the context of God’s covenant with Israel.
- d. *Galatians* 3:13 > **Step three (conclusion)**: According to the gospel—since it is not on the basis of one’s Law-obedience—the basis upon which God’s mercy, *dikaioisune*, and freedom from the curse is granted is the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. *Habakkuk* 2:4, no one will be deemed *dikaiois* (and mercifully granted Life) on the basis of Law-obedience.

★ =Freedom from the curse is granted on the basis of the Messiah’s death.

A. Relevance of *Deuteronomy* 21:23 (cited in *Galatians* 3:13):

- (1) Paul inserts a citation of *Deuteronomy* 21:23 as a parenthetical comment. Its relevance is this: the *Torah* establishes “being hung on a tree” as a symbolic representation of being under a curse. Therefore, the nature of Jesus’s death—namely, death by crucifixion—was an indicator of one important aspect of its meaning and significance. Namely, Jesus’s death represented to us human beings what is due to us because of the curse that we are under.
- e. *Galatians* 3:14 > **Final conclusion following from the arguments above**: *Since Christ (his death and intercession)—and not an individual’s Law-obedience—is the basis upon which God’s mercy will be extended, it is not the person who does the requirements of the Law who will be granted the blessing of Abraham, it is the person who belongs to Jesus—that is, it is the one who is “in” Christ Jesus—who will be granted the blessing of Abraham (whether he does the requirements of the Law or not).*

A. And two important implications follow from this:

Analysis of the Arguments in *Galatians* 3:6-14

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- (1) SINCE THEY TOO CAN BELONG TO JESUS, **GENTILES** (AS WELL AS **JEWS**) CAN RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF **ABRAHAM**, AND
 - (2) THE BLESSING PROMISED TO **ABRAHAM** BY **GOD** (BY THE **SPIRIT**) COMES TO THE **JEWS** BY REASON OF THEIR **BELIEF**, NOT BY REASON OF THEIR **LAW-OBEDIENCE**.