

Two Spheres of Life: Rereading Galatians 3:10-14

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1. Introduction

Galatians 3:10-14 has been the center of scholarly attention for many years. Part of the reason for this is that there are a host of theological issues in this passage. To mention some of the key words is enough to illustrate the point: works of the law, faith in/of Christ, justification, redemption, the Abraham story, in Christ, gentiles in salvation history, and the Spirit, each of which would require a separate article or a monograph for a fuller treatment. Another reason for much scholarly attention has to do with a sheer difficulty of this passage. Despite the presence of numerous profound and complex theological concepts, Paul makes highly condensed arguments about them, which makes it harder to get the plain meaning of this passage, let alone its sophisticated nuances. The fiery scholarly debates on the meaning of some cryptic phrases such as ἔργα νόμου and πίστις Χριστοῦ can be understood in this context. Still worse, Paul's staccato arguments are further complicated by his ambiguous use of the Old Testament. All these difficulties call for an interpreter's extra care and effort in various exegetical decisions. Having acknowledged this, the present study will not pretend to offer final answers to numerous exegetical and theological issues; nor will it revisit all those related scholarly debates. Rather, this article will reread Galatians 3:10-14 with a special attention to the nature of the true gospel. As I will argue in more detail, despite the presence of numerous contested issues, this passage essentially highlights two crucial components of the true gospel: Christ as a new sphere of life and gentiles as beneficiaries of God's blessing. The true gospel that Paul preached from the beginning is

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Christ-centered and gentile-inclusive, as opposed to a false gospel that is law-centered and gentile-excluding. But before examining our passage, we need to take a closer look at Galatians 1-2 in which Paul places several interpretive keys for elucidating Galatians 3:10-14.

2. Surveying the larger context

Since Paul's arguments in Galatians 3:10-14 consist of highly compressed statements, viewing the larger context is crucial for interpreting this passage. The textual and contextual evidence from other parts of the letter will fill the gap that Paul's staccato arguments create. Further, many of the previous studies underestimate or disregard Galatians 1-2 due to its nature being a "personal narrative", which is allegedly not much relevant to the exegesis of Galatians 3-4 whose nature is essentially a "theological argument."¹⁾ In order to fill this lacuna, we will briefly overview the previous context—Paul's arguments from the beginning up to this point.

The opening of Paul's letters is not simply about greetings and salutation, but often sets the tone for the following narrative. Galatians is not an exception on this; Paul places in it an important key to the interpretation of the letter as a whole. It is remarkable that the prelude and postlude of Galatians are framed by apocalyptic motifs: the present evil age (1:4) and new creation (6:15).²⁾ This observation indicates that Paul's arguments in Galatians are to be read apocalyptically, with a special reference to the contrasting two ages: this age and the age to come.³⁾ In other words, Paul invites Galatians to grasp an important truth that the present evil age and its powers must be gone when the new age and its powers come. As we shall see below in greater detail, there are a number of

1) Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Galatians 1 and 2: Autobiography as Paradigm", *NovT* 28 (1986), 311.

2) Richard B. Hays, "Apocalyptic Poiēsis in Galatians: Paternity, Passion, and Participation", Mark W. Elliott, et al., eds., *Galatians and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 200, 203; G. Walter Hansen, "A Paradigm of the Apocalypse: The Gospel in the Light of Epistolary Analysis", Mark D. Nanos, ed., *The Galatians Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 154.

3) For an apocalyptic reading of Galatians, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

antithetical themes throughout the letter such as law and Christ/faith/promise, curse and blessing, flesh and spirit, slave and son, etc., and I would argue that these antithetical themes can be best understood in the scheme of the two ages and their correlating values and powers. Another element worth noting in this opening part is that Christ's death is depicted as a decisive factor that results in the inbreaking of the new age (1:4). The implication is that, after the Christ-event, a new age has dawned and Christians are thus to live according to a new set of values that are demanded by the new age.

In Galatians 1:6-10, Paul addresses the gist of the problem of the Galatian church: they turn away from the "gospel of Christ" (which is the true gospel) and become attracted to a "different gospel" (which is a false gospel). What is intriguing in Paul's description about the false gospel is that those who preach the false gospel are to be cursed (ἀνάθεμα; 1:8, 9), which echoes the language of curse in our passage (κατάρα and its cognates; 3:10, 13). The fact that, despite the different Greek words, the language of curse is completely absent throughout the letter except these verses strongly suggests that Galatians 1:6-10 may offer a key to the interpretation of our passage. The point to be noted is that the cursed ones in Galatians 1:6-10 are those who proclaim the false gospel, whereas the ones under a curse in Galatians 3:10-14 are those who adhere to law observance. In other words, it seems that the false gospel in the Galatian church has to do with law observance.

Then in Galatians 1:11-24, Paul defends his apostolate and this includes two crucial elements. First, his gospel had a divine origin: it was *revealed* from God/Jesus, which again underscores the apocalyptic nature of this letter. Paul did not receive the gospel from a human, but it was given through the revelation ("ἀποκαλύψεως") of Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12). He also emphasized the fact that it was God who called him and revealed ("ἀποκαλύψαι") Jesus in him for this apostolic ministry (vv. 15-16). The revelatory nature of the gospel is echoed later in other gospel activities such as Paul's defense of the gospel (2:2, "ἀνέβην δὲ κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν") and his explication of the gospel (3:23, "εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι"). Second, the core feature of this revealed gospel is the inclusion of gentiles. Though Paul "was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (v. 14) in the past, it turns out that he was actually called to proclaim the gospel "*among the gentiles*" (v. 16). That Paul traveled to

the regions where gentiles resided *before* going up to Jerusalem probably reflects his clear perception of this calling (vv. 17-24).

The Jerusalem Council (2:1-10) was the official meeting in which Paul's apostolic ministry (i.e. preaching the gospel to the gentiles) was fully accepted by the leaders of the Jerusalem church. There it was confirmed that Paul "had been entrusted with the gospel *for the uncircumcised*", just as Peter for the circumcised (vv. 7-9). In other words, for Paul, the inclusion of gentiles is a crucial part of the true gospel. It is also interesting to note that Paul spent quite a long space (three verses out of ten; vv. 3-5) for depicting the issue of his gentile companion's circumcision. Paul's remarks about Titus's circumcision may give an additional hint to the interpretation of our passage since they ultimately address the larger issue of law observance. Paul's intention seems to pinpoint the fundamental failure of a different gospel: the compulsion of unnecessary burden—in this case, circumcision in particular and law observance in general—upon gentile Christians, when it comes to having a right relationship with God. Paul intentionally chose *not* to circumcise Titus, because to do so may result in the misrepresentation of the gospel in such a way that the true gospel still means keeping the law rather than finding freedom in Christ (2:4). As Galatians 2:5 indicates, Paul believes that the true gospel is at stake here.

The Antioch incident (2:11-21) is a vivid example that illustrates the nature of the false gospel, which is law-centered and gentile-excluding. The proper understanding of this unit hinges on how to interpret Paul's statement in v. 16: a person is justified not by ἔργα νόμου but by πίστις Χριστοῦ.⁴⁾ Again, owing to the lack of Paul's explanations about these cryptic phrases, exegetical and theological debates on them have been vigorous among scholars. Setting the details of debates aside for a moment, let us focus on the fact that the proper understanding of Galatians 2:16 is crucial for the interpretation of Galatians 3:10-14. Why? The reason is that the idea of the former passage (i.e. justification not by works of the law but by faith in/of Christ) comes up again in the latter passage. But in order to comprehend the essential idea of Galatians 2:16 that lacks a sustained explication, we need to take a look at the Antioch incident as a

4) Graham Stanton, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ", James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 103: "It is generally agreed that 2:15-16 is a programmatic statement which is expounded and underlined in the sections of Galatians which follow."

whole.⁵⁾

Paul challenges Peter head on because Peter's withdrawal from the meal with gentiles put the true gospel in jeopardy. Both Paul and Peter know that, according to the true gospel, justification is not by works of the law but by faith in/of Christ (2:16).⁶⁾ In other words, after the Christ-event (2:21; cf. 1:4), law observance or Jewish way of living no longer claims its jurisdiction on believers, especially on gentiles; now faith in/of Christ is a superior norm that Jews and gentiles can enjoy together (cf. 3:28). To express this in terms of apocalyptic dualism, the old age (characterized by the law) must be gone as the new age (defined by Jesus Christ) now comes. Peter's withdrawal is significantly flawed because his act demonstrates that he still adheres to the values of the old age and rebuilds the very things that were once torn down (i.e. law observance; 2:17). Even if Peter finds himself as a transgressor of the law in an effort to keep the Christ-values by eating with gentiles, let him be the transgressor!⁷⁾ The reason is that it is ultimately Christ, not the law, that defines his way of living (2:18-21). Peter's behavior is wrong not due to his meritorious works or the law functioning as a boundary marker, but because he, by withdrawal, implies that law observance is still in force and thereby leaves gentile believers outside the community of faith.⁸⁾ In short, Peter's withdrawal vividly manifests what the false gospel looks like: law-centered and gentile-excluding.

Another important element to be noted in the Antioch incident is participation in Christ. Though Paul does not enunciate how this participation in or union with Christ happens, it seems that Paul configures justification primarily in

5) The following broad sketch is indebted to John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 365-387.

6) Here I must emphasize with Barclay (*Paul and the Gift*, 374, 379) that the primary emphasis in these phrases (i.e. ἔργα νόμου and πίστις Χριστοῦ) falls on law vs. Christ rather than works vs. faith: "The term ἔργα reflects the fact that the Law requires observance in practice, but what is significant is not the bare fact of practices (and thus not 'works' as such) but that they derive from, and oriented to, the Torah ... Just as the emphasis in the first of the two antithetical phrases, 'works of the law' (ἔργα νόμου), falls on the second term (the practice of the *Torah*), so in the second, 'faith in Christ' (πίστις Χριστοῦ), the emphasis falls not on 'faith' but on the *Christ* on whom this faith is founded. For Paul, what is essential about faith is only that one is 'seeking to be considered righteous in Christ' (2:17)."

7) This is my paraphrasing of Timothy G. Gombis, "The 'Transgressor' and the 'Curse of the Law': The Logic of Paul's Argument in Galatians 2-3", *NTS* 53 (2007), 87-88.

8) Normand Bonneau, "The Logic of Paul's Argument on the Curse of the Law in Galatians 3:10-14", *NovT* 39 (1997), 68-69.

terms of believers' participation in what Christ has done.⁹⁾ "The paradigmatic I" (thus inviting Galatian believers to imitate him in this respect) has been crucified *with Christ* and now lives *in Christ* (2:19-20); and this participation language is not unique to Galatians but also found in Paul's other letters (Rom 6:3-6; 7:6; 2Co 4:10; Phi 3:10; Col 2:20; 3:3).¹⁰⁾ That Paul's talk of justification *by faith in/of Christ* in 2:16 ("δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ") smoothly switches to justification *in Christ* in 2:17 ("δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ") seems to underscore the same point: i.e. justification understood primarily in terms of participation in Christ.

Lastly, some comments on Galatians 3:1-9 are in order. In the first unit (vv. 1-5), in view of the two ages, the contrasting or even clashing values are still attested, but with a slight modification and a new import. Regarding the slight modification, we see "works of the law" versus "hearing of faith." As to the new import, whereas justification was the predominant expression for depicting a right relationship with God in 2:11-21, now in 3:1-5, "the present experience of the spirit bears witness to a right relationship with God."¹¹⁾ In the second unit (vv. 6-9), there is another new import that will be picked up again in our passage (3:14) and the following (Gal 3-4): the Abraham story. The traditional reading of this unit presents Abraham as a paradigm of faith (i.e. Abraham's *trust* in God is paradigmatic for believers' *trust* in Christ). But it seems that this reading does not have much to offer for explaining a participatory, vicarious, and representative nature of the Abraham story: God's blessing upon gentiles is accomplished *in* Abraham, or probably more precisely *in* his seed Jesus Christ (3:14, 16, 29).¹²⁾ Of course this is not a matter of either/or choice, but a matter

9) For participatory soteriology, see Daniel G. Powers, *Salvation Through Participation*, CBET 29 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001); Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 40-104. It is also to be noted that this confirms our previous argument that the primary emphasis in the phrase "faith in/of Christ" falls on Christ rather than faith, because what is significant in justification is not believers' faith per se but their faith or participation in what *Christ* has done.

10) Richard B. Hays, *Galatians*, NIB 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 243-244. For 'participation' as a dominant motif in Paul's letters and his gospel, see Susan Grove Eastman, "Apocalypse and Incarnation: The Participatory Logic of Paul's Gospel", Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink, eds., *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 165-182.

11) Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 86.

12) For this alternative reading, see Richard B. Hays, "What Is 'Real Participation in Christ'?", Fabian E. Udoh, et al., eds., *Redeeming First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 340-341; Terence L. Donaldson, "The 'Curse

of primary emphasis. It is true and important that Abraham believed in God (as in a traditional reading), but what is more important is that Abraham is depicted as “a representative figure, who initiates a process of salvation, characterized by faith, that ultimately is fulfilled for a group which Paul designates οἱ ἐκ πίστεως” (as in an alternative reading).¹³⁾ But both readings find a common ground in the fact that God’s covenant with Abraham entails a blessing *to the gentiles*, which highlights a crucial element of Paul’s true gospel.

To sum up, we may deduce from this cursory overview of the previous context some important principles that we need to consider when interpreting Galatians 3:10-14. First, in a macroscopic level, Paul envisions two ages. This is why, in a microscopic level, we can find, as correlating values of the two ages, a set of antithetical themes throughout the letter. Among many antitheses, the overarching one is law and Christ. In Paul’s mind, law and Christ are totally different spheres of life; thus loyalty to one sphere must mean disloyalty to another when two spheres are in conflict. Second, what is implicit in the first principle now needs to be stated explicitly: that the primary emphasis in the phrases like ἔργα νόμου and πίστις Χριστοῦ falls on law and Christ rather than works and faith.¹⁴⁾ The latter phrase is more confusing because Paul sometimes makes a contrast between law and faith later in the letter without a reference to Christ (e.g. 3:1-5, 11-12). However, we must bear in mind that Paul’s primary concern in formulating this phrase is not to focus on a person’s faith itself but to highlight his or her faith in/of *Christ*. Third, as a corollary of the second principle, this is probably why Paul understands the true gospel as “the gospel of *Christ*” (1:7), not the gospel of faith. For Paul, the true gospel is about claiming the centrality of Jesus Christ as a new sphere of life, while the false gospel tends to go back to an old sphere of life, that is, law and its observance. As Paul declares, the true gospel was originated from Jesus Christ, through “the revelation of Jesus *Christ*” (1:12), and the true gospel finds its continuing significance in embracing a new identity “in Christ” (2:19-21). Fourth, another

of the Law’ and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3:13-14”, *NTS* 32 (1986), 101-102. Again, the participatory language seems to highlight the fact that in the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ, the primary emphasis falls on Christ rather than faith, whether the genitive construction is construed as objective or subjective.

13) Terence L. Donaldson, “Inclusion of the Gentiles”, 101.

14) We have mentioned this several times above especially in notes 6, 9, and 12.

core element of the true gospel is the inclusion of gentiles. Whether it is Paul's call, or its confirmation from Jerusalem Council, or Peter's failure in the Antioch incident, or God's covenantal promise with Abraham, all these events and narratives highlight the significance of the inclusion of gentiles in God's salvific plan.

3. A fresh reading of Galatians 3:10-14

With these observations in mind, let us now turn to Galatians 3:10-14 in order to see how these principles can clarify Paul's staccato arguments in our passage.

3.1. What is wrong with works of the law? (3:10)

Paul's staccato argument in v. 10 is further compounded by the seeming contradiction between Paul's statement (v. 10a) and his scriptural support (v. 10b). Christopher D. Stanley captures the conundrum of this verse well: "Whereas Paul's own statement appears to pronounce a 'curse' upon anyone who would attempt to live by the Jewish Torah, the biblical text to which he appeals clearly affirms the opposite: its 'curse' falls not on those who *do* the Law, but on those who *fail* to do it."¹⁵ This hermeneutical gap produces a number of scholarly proposals that are well summarized elsewhere and thus need not to be reiterated here.¹⁶ Instead, we will briefly review the two interpretive options that receive relatively wide scholarly support: Old Perspective and New Perspective.

The proponents of Old Perspective argue that this conundrum can be easily resolved by inserting unexpressed assumption: that no one can keep the law perfectly.¹⁷ Then Paul's line of thought becomes clear: "(1) All who do not

15) Christopher D. Stanley, " 'Under a Curse': A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10-14", *NTS* 36 (1990), 481.

16) James M. Scott, " 'For as Many as Are of Works of the Law Are under a Curse' (Galatians 3.10)", Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, eds., *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 188-197.

17) For this reading, see J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: MacMillan, 1896), 137; Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Paul*, Harold Knight, trans. (London: Lutterworth, 1961), 175-177; Robert H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul", *Bib* 66 (1985), 23-25;

keep the law perfectly are cursed [Gal 3:10b, Paul's citation of Deu 27:26]. (2) No one can keep the law perfectly [unexpressed assumption]. (3) Therefore, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse [Gal 3:10a, Paul's statement]."¹⁸⁾ However, the traditional reading suffers a number of difficulties. First, as Wakefield says, "Jewish understanding of the law never supposed that perfect obedience to the law was either possible or necessary, either for maintaining the blessing or avoiding the curse."¹⁹⁾ In this respect, it is noteworthy that Paul had a "robust conscience" declaring himself "as to the righteousness under the law, *blameless*" (Phi 3:6)—in a word, perfect obedience to the law is *not* impossible.²⁰⁾ Second, not only Palestinian Judaism but also the larger context of Deuteronomy "seems to assume that obedience to the law and its attendant blessings were humanly possible (cf. Deu 30:11-14)."²¹⁾ Third, even if one fails to keep the law perfectly, he or she can always find ways to maintain one's covenantal status. In Sanders's terms, "means of atonement for transgression" are readily available to the transgressors of the law.²²⁾ Fourth and most importantly, even if all these difficulties turn out to be unwarranted, Paul's main contention in this passage is not whether perfect obedience to the law is possible or not, but that "keeping the commandments could not produce 'justification' and 'life' even if the law could be fulfilled in its entirety."²³⁾ In short, the fact that perfect obedience to the law is not only possible but also "beside the point" in Paul's argument seems to undercut the plausibility of Old Perspective reading.²⁴⁾

The New Perspective offers a fresh reading by redefining the phrase "works of the law." According to this view, in the phrase, the "works" do not generally refer to human deeds or meritorious works, but point to some specific practices of the law that function to distinguish Israelites from other pagans. In this

Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 204-206; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 204-205.

18) This nice syllogism comes from Thomas R. Schreiner, "Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible: A Re-Examination of Galatians 3:10", *JETS* 27 (1984), 151.

19) Andrew Hollis Wakefield, *Where to Live*, AcBib 14 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 68.

20) Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78-96.

21) James M. Scott, "Under a Curse", 188.

22) E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 75.

23) Christopher D. Stanley, "Under a Curse", 482.

24) Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 178.

context, the works that the law demands (such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance) are wrong not because they rely on human works, but because practicing them results in the exclusion of gentiles from God's covenant and blessing. Works of the law as "a boundary marker" or "a badge of national identity" turn out to be an obstacle to God's salvific plan of extending the covenant blessing to the gentiles.²⁵⁾

Of course New Perspective is not a monolithic idea that involves a number of theological and exegetical issues and even scholars in this camp have differing opinions on different matters²⁶⁾; but they would generally agree on this view of "works of the law" briefly sketched above. Indeed, there are some significant improvements in New Perspective: it accentuates that the inclusion of the gentiles are not subsidiary but central to Paul's gospel²⁷⁾; it also fits better to the immediate context of Paul's argument because works of the law are addressed not in a general context of human works, but in the particular context in which the specific practices of the law such as food laws (2:11-21) and circumcision (2:1-10; 5:2-7) are in view²⁸⁾; third, New Perspective reading seems to be historically and sociologically more sensitive than Old Perspective, as it corrects the traditional caricature of Judaism as a works-righteous religion (thus historically sensitive) and adds an important social implication that different identities including ethnicity can be united in Christ (cf. 3:28).

Though New Perspective reading certainly enhances our understanding of Paul's thoughts, it seems still inadequate to express the full picture. First, unlike the depiction of New Perspective, Paul's fault with works of the law is not about some specific practices of the law, but about the law in its entirety as an old sphere of life. On this, Paul's adapted citation of Deuteronomy 27:26 is extremely illuminating. Paul broadens the narrow language of Deuteronomy "the words of this law" (which refers to the twelve commands of Deu 27:15-26) into "all the things written in the book of the law" (Paul's adapted citation in Gal

25) Though Dunn would be happy with both terms, Wright (*The Climax of the Covenant* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 142, 150) seems hesitant to use the latter term.

26) N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 90.

27) T. David Gordon ("The Problem at Galatia", *Int* 41 [1987], 36) argues that this is partly indicated in the fact that the issue of gentiles is mentioned from the beginning of the letter, whereas the issue of justification appears first in Gal 2 and disappears after Gal 3.

28) James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14)", *NTS* 31 (1985), 535.

3:10b).²⁹⁾ Second, it is worth reiterating that Paul’s primary concern in the phrase “works of the law” falls on law rather than works. Both New Perspective and Old Perspective fail on this because they focus on the secondary question—what is wrong with *works* of the law and what kinds of *works* do Paul have trouble with? But Paul’s more urgent concern is to show that the law ultimately cannot and will not bring life and blessing because it belongs to the old age. The law is at best an old, “past” sphere of life and thus one’s allegiance to it must fail, which is expressed here as “under a curse.”³⁰⁾

That Paul envisions the law as a sphere of life is indicated in the preposition ὑπό. There is a discrepancy between Paul’s statement (“under a curse”; 3:10a) and Deuteronomy 27:26 (“cursed”; 3:10b). Some scholars completely ignore this issue, but others consider it significant.³¹⁾ Some of those who take issue with this discrepancy argue that it can be understood in light of its conditional nature.³²⁾ In other words, those who rely on works of the law are under a curse *as a possibility*: if they keep the law perfectly, the curse will not fall upon them; but if otherwise, they will be cursed as Deuteronomy 27:26 pronounces. But we have already seen that whether one can fulfill the law or not is beside the point; Paul touches on the issue of the law in a more profound level: that the law, regardless of its fulfillability, cannot and will not take us to the promised land of life and blessing.

This brings us to an alternative reading of ὑπό language as denoting a realm of authority. The proponents of this view maintain that the usage of this preposition in Galatians prefers this interpretive option. To quote a few scholars’ comments is sufficient to illustrate the point. Longenecker observes, “In each occurrence it

29) Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 141; In-Gyu Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, JSNTSup 81 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 80-81; Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 232.

30) John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 403.

31) As far as the comments on 3:10 are concerned, the following scholars do not even mention this issue: Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988); Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, SP 9 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992); Marion L. Soards and Darrell Pursifull, *Galatians* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2015).

32) Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, 89; Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 233; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 204; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, 201; Peter Oakes, *Galatians*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 109.

[the preposition ὑπό] expresses a situation of being under the authority or power of that which it modifies.”³³) Similarly, Das says, “In Galatians the Greek preposition ὑπό with the accusative case expresses being ‘under’ the authority or power of someone or something.”³⁴) Onwuka makes the same point: “The preposition ὑπό with the accusative is used here to indicate that which is in a controlling position. It indicates being under the control, power, sovereignty of something.”³⁵) Spicing up this with apocalyptic language, de Boer says, “those ‘under a curse’ are still stuck ‘in the present evil age’ (1:4), where malevolent powers hold all human beings ‘under’ their control, one of these cosmic powers evidently being the law itself (3:23; 4:4-5, 21). To be under a curse, here the curse of the law, is to be outside the realm of salvation.”³⁶)

Putting all these together, we may now be prepared to answer the question stated in the title of this section: what is wrong with “works of the law”? They are wrong not because perfect obedience to the law is impossible or because they function as a narrow national identity marker. Rather, the real problem of works of the law is that they belong to the old age; and thus those who still adhere to law observance express no more than their loyalty to outdated values.

3.2. Law and Christ as mutually exclusive spheres of life (3:11-12)

In terms of Paul’s essential argument, vv. 11-12 do not add much since they reiterate the main idea expressed in v. 10 (i.e. that law and Christ are totally different spheres of life and thus that a person’s loyalty to one sphere must mean his or her disloyalty to the other). But examining these verses is still necessary because (1) these verses need some *clarification* for the coherent reading of Galatians 3:10-14 as a unit and (2) they bring further *illumination* to Paul’s essential argument.

Regarding the clarification, Paul’s overarching antithesis in these verses needs to be clarified. Unlike the previous context (1:1-3:9) where law and Christ

33) Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 116.

34) A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 314.

35) Peter Chidolue Onwuka, *The Law, Redemption and Freedom in Christ* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2007), 66.

36) Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 198.

usually stand in contrast, here in 3:11-12, law and faith come into prominence. But we must not assume that this change of opposing referents necessitates the shift of Paul's primary concern (i.e. from "law vs. Christ" to "law vs. faith"), because Paul, even after some twists and turns of contrasting themes, always comes back on track to the original overarching antithesis—law and Christ. For example, in 3:15-29, after the talk of inheritance from law vs. promise (vv. 15-21) and the coming of law vs. faith (vv. 23-25), Paul claims that the promise is fulfilled not in the law but in Christ Jesus (vv. 26-29). In a similar vein, Paul's allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-5:1) contains various competing themes such as slavery vs. freedom, flesh vs. promise, and flesh vs. spirit; but they are fundamentally framed by the overarching antithesis: law as an enslaving power (4:21) vs. Christ as a giver of freedom (5:1). Similarly, despite some variances of conflicting themes (e.g. law vs. faith/grace/spirit), Galatians 5:2-5 are best understood in light of this overarching antithesis because this unit begins and ends with the discussion of law (v. 2) and Christ (v. 5). The same pattern can be found in Galatians 3:10-14 because Paul, after discussing two ways of justification in law vs. from faith (vv. 10-12), comes back to the overarching antithesis: the *law* under a curse vs. *Christ* as the redeemer from that curse (vv. 13-14). In light of this, we may safely conclude that Paul, even with the contrast between law and faith in vv. 11-12, has the overarching antithesis (i.e. law vs. faith in/of *Christ*) firmly in his mind.³⁷⁾

Concerning further illumination on Paul's essential argument, the ways Paul frames the discussion in these verses highlight the law as a sphere of life. First, we must emphasize the fact that Paul has still in view the entire law in vv. 11-12, as he does in v. 10. As mentioned earlier in v. 10, Paul's adapted citation of Deuteronomy 27:26 (i.e. from 'this law' to 'all in the law') shows that his trouble with the law is not about some aspects of the law but about the law in its entirety. This becomes all the more evident in vv. 11-12 where Paul begins talking even more generally about the law without the qualification of "works." On this, it is notable that the mention of "works of the law" completely disappears from 3:10b onward; and in vv. 11-12 and in the following chapters Paul addresses the law in a more general and fundamental level.³⁸⁾ Paul's

37) Similarly, Jeffrey R. Wisdom, *Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law*, WUNT 133 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 190-191.

38) J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 312.

general tone about the law, in itself, does not prove that Paul sees the law as a sphere of life, but it at least points to this possibility. But, second, this possibility gains more probability when we observe the change of preposition from ἐκ (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου in v. 10) to ἐν (ἐν νόμῳ in v. 11 and ἐν αὐτοῖς in v. 12). In other words, it seems that, with the use of ἐν, Paul intends to evoke the locative sense—“in” the law as a sphere of life.³⁹⁾ Of course the preposition ἐν is not necessarily to be construed in a locative sense (i.e. justification *in* the law); it can be also translated in an instrumental sense (i.e. justification *by* the law), as many scholars would argue.⁴⁰⁾ However, in order to determine the primary sense here, rather than examining the relationship between “ἐξ ἔργων νόμου” in v. 10 and “ἐν νόμῳ” in v. 11,⁴¹⁾ we need to pay more attention to Galatians 5:4 where the only other occurrence of justification ἐν νόμῳ (without the qualification of “works”) is found.⁴²⁾ In Galatians 5:4, the locative sense nicely fits into Paul’s argument since he seems to envision law and Christ as two spheres of life: when you find justification *in the law*, then you cut off from Christ, which means that you are *not in Christ* any more. Further, the locative sense becomes a more attractive interpretive option when we remember that the language of “in Christ” as a counterpart of ἐν νόμῳ is pervasive throughout the letter (1:22; 2:4, 16-21; 3:13-14, 26-29; 4:19; 5:6). If it is correct that Galatians 5:4 sheds an illuminating light on how we interpret Galatians 3:11-12, then this also confirms our previous proposal that, even with the reference to law vs. faith, the overarching antithesis in Galatians 3:11-12 must be law vs. Christ, as this is the case in Galatians 5:4.

Despite a number of exegetical and theological issues in vv. 11-12, if we keep these two points (i.e. law vs. Christ as an overarching antithesis and law

39) De Boer (*Galatians*, 203) captures this idea well: “The law and its commandments here constitute a realm or a sphere determining a person’s existence, the manner in which one ‘shall live.’”

40) For a locative sense, see Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, 54; Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, 90; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 312; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians*, 203. For an instrumental sense, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, 146; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 88-89; Norman H. Young, “Who’s Cursed—And Why? (Galatians 3:10-14)”, *JBL* 117 (1998), 88-89; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 207; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, 206; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, 318; Peter Oakes, *Galatians*, 76; Debbie Hunn, “Galatians 3.10-12: Assumptions and Argumentation”, *JSNT* 37 (2015), 259.

41) Almost all commentators make remarks on this.

42) Almost all commentators neglect this connection between 3:11 and 5:4 except de Boer (*Galatians*, 203), though he gives only scriptural reference in passing without much explanation.

and Christ as spheres of life) firmly in mind, tracing Paul's line of thought is not hard. Whether δῆλον in v. 11 goes with the previous ὅτι or the following ὅτι, whether the righteous one in Habakkuk 2:4 refers to the Messiah or a believer in general, whether ἐκ πίστεως modifies δίκαιος or ζήσεται, whether in the phrase “ἐκ πίστεως” the primary emphasis is on faith or faithfulness, Paul's overall argument will not greatly change and can be summarized as follows: law and Christ are mutually exclusive spheres of life (3:12a) and thus the ways of life that each sphere demands are totally different. In other words, law-people (i.e. those who belong to the sphere of law) are expected to live according to law observance that inevitably leads them to a curse (3:11a, 12b). By contrast, Christ-people find their identity and shape their lives on the basis of faith (3:11b), which inevitably leads them to a blessing and promise (cf. 3:14).

3.3. In Christ: blessing and promise (3:13-14)

Once again, there are a number of issues that involve scholarly debates in Galatians 3:13-14. But since our primary concern is to elucidate Paul's staccato arguments about the true gospel, we, rather than reproducing all these debates here, will take a different route: with the principles discussed above in mind, we will look for additional textual and contextual evidence that may lend further clarity to Paul's staccato arguments in these verses.

Some scholars think that the appeal to Christ seems quite abrupt since Paul speaks of law, faith, spirit, curse, and blessing without a single reference to Christ in 3:2-12. So they attempt to explain this by attributing these verses to “pre-Pauline” traditional material, or by noting a possible link between these verses and the previous OT citation (i.e. Hab 2:4 as a messianic text) for “smoother” transition.⁴³⁾ But it is worth repeating that the overarching antithesis of law and Christ is fundamentally established from the beginning. Thus we can say that the introduction of Christ is not abrupt; just as he was in the previous context, Christ is presented here again as a new sphere of life.

To demonstrate Christ as a new sphere of life, in v. 13 Paul first portrays the law as an old sphere of life under which people are enslaved to the power of

43) Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 121-122; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 179.

curse. On this, Paul's use of the verb ἐξαγοράζω for depicting Christ's work is extremely illuminating. The verb is rarely used in the entire New Testament (four times only in Pauline letters); out of four occurrences, two times are attested in Pauline undisputed letters, here and Galatians 4:5. It is possible that the language of redemption "harkens back to the exodus, where Yahweh freed his people from Egyptian bondage."⁴⁴ But this is probably not the case because Paul cites or echoes the Exodus story nowhere in Galatians. Further, Paul's tone is more general and fundamental (i.e. law as a sphere of life, which makes it hard to limit its undergirding motif to the Exodus story alone). The more plausible reading would be that Paul here appeals to the conventional usage of this language—"the emancipation of slaves."⁴⁵ Then Paul's intention of using this verb becomes clear: to show that those who belong to the sphere of the law are under the bondage or enslaving power of the law; and it is Christ alone who can deliver them from this curse.

That Paul envisions the law as a wrong sphere of life incurring enslavement and curse is further confirmed in Galatians 4:5 (where the only other occurrence of the verb ἐξαγοράζω is found) and its immediate context.⁴⁶ Paul's way of describing law and Christ in these verses are strikingly similar to that in Galatians 3:13-14; and Galatians 4:1-7 is more explicit where Galatians 3:13-14 is latent, especially on the two fronts. First, whereas Paul implies the enslaving power of the law in Galatians 3:13 by using the verb ἐξαγοράζω, in Galatians 4:1-7 Paul *explicitly* states this point in two different ways: that being under the law is somewhat similar to being "*enslaved* to the elemental spirits of the world" (4:3) and that a major benefit of Christ's redemption is to declare us "no longer a *slave* but a child" (4:4-7). Second, whereas the apocalyptic/eschatological significance of Christ's coming and redemption is *not indicated* at all in Galatians 3:13, Paul is *more explicit* on this matter in later verses by adding the expression "when the fullness of time had come" (4:4).⁴⁷ In other words, Paul's discussion in Galatians 4:1-7 is fundamentally shaped by apocalyptic eschatological motifs: the law belongs to this world ("the elemental spirits of the

44) Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 216.

45) Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 238; similarly, J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 317; Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, 92; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians*, 210; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, 325.

46) Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 92.

47) Susan Grove Eastman, "Apocalypse and Incarnation", 169.

world”),⁴⁸⁾ while Christ belongs to a new time, a new age (“the fullness of time”). In short, Galatians 4:5 and its immediate context lend further clarity to Galatians 3:13 by providing the broader context where law and Christ are presented as mutually exclusive spheres of life that belong to the two contrasting ages.

If this reading is correct, then the force of “in Christ” in v. 14 should not be missed. What is implicit in 3:13 and what is further clarified in Galatians 4:1-7 (i.e. that law and Christ must be understood primarily as a sphere of life) are now doubly confirmed in this phrase, “in Christ.” In the words of v. 14, “the blessing of Abraham” is now available “to the gentiles” who are incorporated into and thus belong “*in Christ*” as a new sphere of life. The link between blessing to the gentiles, Abraham, and Christ that was implicit earlier in 3:8 is now clear: when Paul says in 3:8, quoting Genesis 15:6, “all the gentiles shall be blessed *in you* [Abraham],” he actually envisions gentiles’ inheritance of the blessing *in Christ*, Abraham’s seed; this is what our passage explicitly states and 3:15-18 will further elucidate. Since Christ’s death and resurrection inaugurates a new age (3:13), gentiles can find the blessing of Abraham in and only in the new sphere of life, namely, in Christ (3:14a).

Once law and Christ as spheres of life come into sharp focus, now it must be stressed that one purpose/result (as ἵνα clause indicates) of Christ’s redemption is that gentiles now become co-heirs of Abraham’s blessing. It is remarkable that the phrase εἰς τὰ ἔθνη in v. 14a goes forward in an emphatic position.⁴⁹⁾ So if we reflect this force in our translation: “so that *to the gentiles* the blessing of Abraham might come in Christ Jesus.” As we have already seen in the overview of the previous context, Paul here emphasizes the same point: the inclusion of gentiles is an indispensable element of the true gospel.

In v. 14b Paul speaks of another purpose/result of Christ’s redemptive work: “so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Here, whether “we” is to be understood exclusively (only Jews) or inclusively (Jews and gentiles alike) or whether “the blessing of Abraham” is same with or different from “the promise of the Spirit” is not much relevant for our

48) Here I am arguing, with Witherington (*Grace in Galatia*, 286), not that the law is to be equated with the elemental spirits but that the former is one form of the latter.

49) G. Walter Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians*, JSNTSup 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 123.

purposes.⁵⁰⁾ Instead, our primary concern is on the fact that Christ’s redemption brings the promise of the Spirit *through faith* (διὰ τῆς πίστεως). On this point, I would argue that, even if Paul here refers to faith only, he probably has in mind a specific kind of faith—faith in/of *Christ*. This is one of the principles that we have emphasized all along. Further, the “awkward expression” with inserting a definite article (literally, “through *the* faith”) seems to underscore this as well: *the* faith as faith in/of *Christ*.⁵¹⁾ A similar usage of “the faith” also points to the same direction. In 3:23-25, the faith and Christ are used interchangeably⁵²⁾ such that these verses express the same idea with a shift of reference: that the law is our guardian until the faith (= Christ) comes. But then in 3:26-29 onward, it is Christ, not faith, that appears consistently as a counterpart of the law.

These observations prepare us to summarize Paul’s main line of argument in 3:13-14. What the law cannot do—to lead us to blessing and promise—is accomplished in and only in Christ and his redemptive work. These verses and other textual evidence indicate that, despite the twist of reference, law and Christ is still an overarching antithesis as mutually exclusive spheres of life. ‘In Christ’ is categorically different from ‘in the law.’ One of the crucial benefits of being in Christ is that blessing and promise are now extended to the gentiles.

4. Conclusion

Galatians 3:10-14 is one of the most difficult passages in Pauline letters. Paul’s ambiguous citation of the Old Testament, his use of cryptic phrases, his frequent change of reference, and his staccato arguments about heavy theological themes are all contributing factors that have baffled interpreters of Paul. The present study, via various routes, attempts to trace Paul’s train of thought. The study begins with an overview of the previous context that was largely ignored by the previous scholarship due to the allegedly different nature between Galatians 1-2 and Galatians 3-4. But, as it turns out, this overview is

50) For these issues and different readings, see Sam K. Williams, “Justification and the Spirit in Galatians”, *JSNT* 29 (1987), 91-100; John W. Taylor, “The Eschatological Interdependence of Jews and Gentiles in Galatians”, *TynBul* 63 (2012), 291-316.

51) Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, 124-125.

52) Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 268: “In short, ‘the Faith’ here refers to Christ.”

extremely helpful because Paul places in the first two chapters many interpretive keys that significantly enhance our understanding of Galatians 3:10-14. To say these crucial interpretive keys and how they advance our understanding of Galatians 3:10-14 briefly: the letter as a whole is framed by apocalyptic terms, with a special attention to the two ages. This framework invites us to interpret a number of antithetical themes utilized throughout the letter, among which law and Christ stand out as the overarching antithesis. In addition, several participatory motifs and languages portray law and Christ essentially as spheres of life. It is in this very context that our passage makes the best sense. In other words, the law (and its practices) ultimately leads us to curse, because it is at best an old and thus wrong sphere of life. However, since Christ's eschatological redemptive work, the new time has begun and the new age has dawned; now Christ is a new sphere of life in which gentiles can enjoy blessing and promise together with Jews on the basis of faith in/of Christ (rather than law observance). In short, the true gospel that Paul preached from the outset is Christ-centered and gentile-inclusive, as opposed to the false gospel that is law-centered and gentile-excluding.

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apocalyptic, Galatians, in Christ, law, *pistis Christou*.

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<Abstract>

Two Spheres of Life: Rereading Galatians 3:10-14

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Galatians 3:10-14 is arguably one of the most difficult passages in Pauline letters since it contains a number of exegetical and theological issues. But the clear meaning of this passage will emerge when we pay due attention to Galatians 1 and 2 that have been largely ignored in previous studies. Paul places several important interpretive keys in these chapters that may enhance our understanding of Galatians 3:10-14. Such interpretive keys include: that the letter as a whole—especially numerous antithetical themes attested throughout the letter—is best understood in light of apocalyptic two ages; that despite the frequent change of antithetical themes, law and Christ are the overarching antithesis; that law and Christ are depicted essentially as mutually exclusive spheres of life; and that the inclusion of gentiles is the core element of Paul’s true gospel.

Based on these, the rest of the article offers a fresh reading of Galatians 3:10-14. In the exegesis of Galatians 3:10, noting the so-called Old Perspective’s and New Perspective’s inadequate readings of “works of the law,” it argues that the emphasis in this phrase is not on “works” but on “the law.” Thus Paul’s fault with works of the law is neither that they rely on human works nor that some, not all, practices of the law function as boundary markers. But Paul’s real problem is, we propose, that the entire law as a sphere of life cannot produce life and blessing. As to Galatians 3:11-12, there are two main contributions of this article. First, despite Paul’s use of different antithetical referents here (i.e. law vs. faith), the investigation of other parts of the letter reveals that Paul’s overarching antithesis is still clearly law and Christ. Second, the change of expression (from ἐξ ἔργων νόμου in v. 10 to ἐν νόμῳ in v. 11) underscores the law as a sphere of life. Regarding Galatians 3:13-14, Paul’s use of the verb ἐξαιγοράζω stresses the law as an old sphere of life that enslaves those in it. Again, the use of preposition ἐν in association with Christ also highlights him as a new sphere of life.