

# Responding to Some Important Questions on *Galatians*, PART 7

## [Gal. 3:6–14]

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Handout #8

### A. **QUESTION #1:**

In some places, you seem to take a promise that God makes as referring to something God will do for the Jews in history. In other places, you understand God's promise, or elements of that promise, as applying to eternal life, which an individual may receive through God's mercy. My question is this: How do you—or how can anyone—determine which promises are intended specifically for Jews, and which have a universal or eternal referent instead?

Here's where my question is coming from: When you went through the *Genesis* account of God's promise to Abraham, I understood you to be saying that some elements of God's promise were made with reference to Abraham's (literal) offspring, the Jewish people—e.g., “I will make you a great nation.” On the other hand, the promise of Abraham himself being blessed refers to Abraham receiving mercy and eternal life. This—mercy and eternal life—is the blessing that people of all nations will be able to receive through faith in Jesus. The other blessing is just with reference to the Jewish people. Did I understand that right?

This past Sunday, when you looked at *Deuteronomy* and the curses and blessings God has the elders pronounce on the people, you understood “the curse” that Paul refers to as being the *curse* of death or condemnation that all people are under because they are related to Adam. (I want to make sure I got that right too.) Elsewhere, however, I have understood you to be taking the *blessings* in *Deuteronomy* as only applying to the Jewish people. So again, how do you know when it's one and when it's the other? What are the clues to this in the OT? What are the clues in *Galatians* as to how Paul is making those decisions?

### B. **RESPONSE to Question #1:**

1. Note how *Deuteronomy* 27:15 reads: “cursed is the man.”
  - a. What follows *Deuteronomy* 27:15 is a series of *singular* participles.
    - (1) However, the singular does also continue into Chapter 28. And Chapter 28 is clearly speaking of the fate of the people collectively, of the fate of the people of Israel as a whole people group.
  - b. But, it is clear (I think) what Moses has in mind:
    - (1) Chap. 27 describes the assessment that can be made of individuals who transgress in the ways mentioned there. A MAN is under “the curse” if he behaves in the ways described.

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(A) He seems to be saying that the commandments that God is giving to you (the people of Israel) will reveal whether each of you, *as an individual*, is a worthy being who deserves the blessing of God or is a morally unworthy being who deserves to undergo the curse of death. However, it does not necessarily say that an unworthy individual will necessarily be punished with the curse that he is under. That is, it does not foreclose on the possibility of mercy being granted to such an individual.

(2) Chap. 28 describes the fate of the *nation* if each of the Israelites, as individuals, obey God’s commandments; and, alternatively, the fate of the nation if each of the Israelites, as individuals, disobey God’s commandments.

(A) VERY IMPORTANT: but what does every individual “obeying God’s commandments” such that the nation will be blessed look like? Will each individual Jew live morally flawless lives such that not a single transgression is ever committed by any individual in the nation? Or, will individual Jews commit various moral transgressions; but, when they do, they will respond to their own transgressions in just the way that God’s covenant requires them to respond—namely, by offering up the requisite sacrifice?

[1] The latter clearly has to be the case.

2. The *Torah* as a whole is, in effect, saying two things that are in tension with one another:

- a. You are cursed if you do not do EVERYTHING that God requires of you in his Law.
- b. If you transgress God’s Law, go to the priest and offer up such and such an offering.
- c. Why would I say these are in tension with one another?

(1) Because to OBEY God by taking an offering to the priest is an admission that one has NOT DONE EVERYTHING that God requires. Hence, it is an admission that *one is cursed*.

(A) So, if one is hopelessly cursed anyway, what is the point of God requiring a sacrifice? If a sacrifice can do no good, what is the point?

(a) Clearly, God has to be offering forgiveness of some sort and in some sense in connection with the offerings, otherwise the sacrificial system is completely pointless and meaningless.

d. Here is how the tension is resolved:

(1) The “curse” being pronounced against the one who does not do everything that God requires is not a final, absolute declaration that one’s ultimate fate is

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destruction. It is simply a declaration of *what that man deserves*. It does not thereby foreclose on the possibility of mercy however.

(A) The curse does, however, pertain to what that individual *as an individual* deserves. An individual who transgresses God’s Law is deserving of death (i.e., “he is cursed”).

(a) As such, unless such an individual *as an individual* receives mercy from God, death and destruction is his ultimate destiny.

(2) The sacrificial system is provided by God (in the Mosaic Covenant) as the prescribed way for an individual to appeal to God for mercy.

(A) The individual who transgresses God’s Law but appeals to God for mercy in the prescribed way is deemed “righteous” by God.

(B) The individual who transgresses God’s Law but does not appeal to God for mercy in the prescribed way is deemed “unrighteous” by God.

(3) God’s covenant promises to grant peace and prosperity to the people of Israel *as a whole* if the individuals within the people of Israel will repent of their unrighteousness and practice righteousness.

(A) Where the righteousness they are to practice is defined in the note above. This “righteousness” is not moral perfection. It includes appealing to God for mercy (for one’s imperfection) in the prescribed way.

(a) When an individual does something that deserves to be punished with the curse of death but then offers the prescribed offering, he will be contributing to the blessing and prosperity of the entire nation because, if the nation as a whole obeys God’s commandments (including his commandments with respect to how to deal with transgression), God has promised to bring blessings upon them *as a nation*.

[1] This is what *Deuteronomy 28* is about.

e. Here is how *Torah* can be summed up with respect to the promise of a blessing:

(1) The individual who does not do absolutely everything that God requires in his Law is deserving of death (i.e., “is cursed”). He does not deserve a blessing.

(A) As such, unless such an individual *as an individual* receives mercy from God, death and destruction is his ultimate destiny.

(2) The individual who transgresses God’s Law and then responds to his transgression by offering up to God the appropriate sacrifice (with a willing heart that is positively inclined toward God)—such a person is contributing to the well-

being and prosperity of the people of Israel (i.e., to the “blessing” of the people of Israel). For if every individual Jew keeps God’s covenant by (among other things) offering up the appropriate sacrifices when he transgresses, God promises to bless the people of Israel *as a people*.

- (A) Question: is such an individual *as an individual* destined for death and destruction, however—because that is what he deserves (i.e., because he is “cursed”)? Or, is such an individual *as an individual* going to receive mercy—because he has followed God’s instructions with regard to offering a sacrifice in response to his transgression and has done all that God commanded in his Law?
- (a) In other words, does the Israelite offer up a propitiatory offering only for the good of the nation, or for his own good as well?
- (B) CLEARLY, he offers up an offering for his own good as well. For such an individual will also receive mercy from God *as an individual*. Hence, not only will he share in enjoying the blessings granted by God to the people of Israel *as a whole*, but he will also enjoy the ultimate destiny of Life eternal *as an individual*.
- (a) Isn’t this the most straightforward way to take *Ezekiel* 18 (especially in the light of the desires of God that are articulated there in *Ezekiel* 18:23, and 18:32)? Isn’t *Ezekiel* speaking of a righteousness that will result in the individual, *as an individual*, attaining Life rather than death as his ultimate destiny?
- (C) It doesn’t work to try to maintain that the only “blessing” that a “cursed” human being can hope to receive is to enjoy and participate in the blessings that the entire nation is promised if and when the entire nation does righteousness.
- (a) Can we really think that this is what God is saying: You, as an individual (no matter who you are), are going to die. However, there is the possibility that some of you individuals could be fortunate enough to prosper in this lifetime—for as long as you are alive—if and when the nation of Israel *as a whole* repents and obeys my Law?
- (D) In any case, this is clearly the way the entire New Testament understands the provisions of the Law of Moses: *under the Law of Moses, one can receive mercy from God as an individual such that he will enjoy the ultimate destiny of Life eternal if he does what the Law requires in the right sort of way.*
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3. THEREFORE, how do we know what parts of God’s promised blessings pertain to the Jewish people *as a people group* and what parts pertain to each and every human being *as individuals*, and, hence, to Gentiles *as individuals* as well?
- a. All the promised blessings in the OT (except when certain particular statements are explicitly addressed to a particular Gentile people group) are promised to the Jewish people. Therefore,
- (1) If a promise only makes sense as a promise to a people group *as a people group* (and not to individuals *as individuals*), then it is a promise to the Jewish people *as a people group*, and not to any Gentile people group.
- (A) E.g., *Deuteronomy* 28:1-14.
- (B) This is because the clear focus of the entire OT is on the people of Israel.
- (2) If a promise only makes sense as a promise *to an individual*, then it is a promise to Gentile individuals who are chosen of God as well as to Jewish individuals who are chosen of God.
- (A) E.g., the blessing of eternal Life (you will live and not die).
- (B) As we shall see later in *Galatians*, Paul contends that the fact that there is one God who is the author and creator of each and every individual human being entails that every individual human being will be saved in exactly the same way.
- (3) HOWEVER, Gentiles have been “grafted in” to the promises and covenants of God to the Jews. What does that mean? It means that the Gentile believer (along with Life everlasting and all that that entails in the eternal age to come) will also—in the final age of *this* created reality—see, participate in, and enjoy the blessings of the people of Israel in the Kingdom of God within history. It has been promised to us—as Gentile followers of Jesus—that we (as well as Jewish believers) will “reign” with Jesus in the historical Kingdom of God to come.
- (A) So, when all is said and done, a righteous Jew will not enjoy any blessing that a righteous Gentile will not enjoy. We Gentiles will also see and enjoy the fulfillment of each and every promise that God made to Abraham.
- (B) The real and important distinction between Jew and Gentile in the historical kingdom of God is between *mortal* Gentiles and *mortal* Jews during that time in history. The mortal Jews of that day are promised blessings that no Gentile nation has been promised. But for those of us who are “in Christ” and shall—at that time —have been made immortal, we will be co-participants in the
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righteous reign of Christ over all the mortal Jews and over all the kingdoms of mortal Gentiles in the world.

C. **QUESTION #2:**

In the light of what you argued and concluded about righteousness being (theoretically) attainable to a person through his law-keeping (*vis à vis* the *Ezekiel*, *Leviticus*, and *Deuteronomy* passages), how do you understand Paul's assertion back in *Galatians* 2:21 [¶10.17 > “Indeed, if *dikaiosune* is through the Covenant, then the *messiah* died for no reason.”]?

D. **RESPONSE to Question #2:**

1. This is a good and important question. It is precisely so that we might have the resources to be able to answer this and other similar questions that I devoted the entire talk two weeks ago to attempting to make clear the distinction between the BASIS for *dikaiosune*, a SUFFICIENT CONDITION for *dikaiosune*, and a NECESSARY CONDITION for *dikaiosune*. As difficult (and tedious) as coming to terms with those distinctions might be. They are crucial for understanding Paul here in *Galatians*—as this question highlights.
2. *Galatians* 2:21 is speaking of the **basis** for *dikaiosune*. As I tried to show last week—according to *Deuteronomy*, *Leviticus*, and *Ezekiel*—*dikaiosune* is attainable through Law-keeping. But this is **not** because one's Law-keeping is the BASIS upon which *dikaiosune* will be granted to a person. Rather, it is because, under the terms of the covenant between God and Israel, one's Law-keeping is the CONDITION that one must meet in order for *dikaiosune* to be granted to him.
  - a. The point that Paul is making in *Galatians* 2:21 is that Law-keeping is not the BASIS for *dikaiosune*. [“Indeed, if *dikaiosune* is through the Covenant, then the *messiah* died for no reason.” = “Indeed, if *dikaiosune* is BASED ON the keeping of the Covenant, then the *messiah* died for no reason.”] But Paul is not for a second suggesting in *Galatians* 2:21 that Law-keeping never was, under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, a valid CONDITION by which *dikaiosune* could be attained.

E. **QUESTION #3:**

Context for my second question: in *Galatians* 3:14 [¶13.8], you argued for taking "the promise of the spirit" to denote the blessing of eternal Life that was promised to Abraham by God (i.e., the blessing of eternal Life promised by God, who is "the Spirit"). However, it seems to me that *Galatians* 3:14 is most straightforwardly seen as a summing up of his answer to the rhetorical question that he posed back up in *Galatians* 3:2–3 [¶11.3–¶11.5]. Hence, it would seem that the question he poses in *Galatians* 3:2–3 [¶11.3–¶11.5]—“did you receive the Spirit by works, or by faith?”—is the relevant context for understanding *Galatians* 3:14 [¶13.8]. In those two earlier verses, your own translation indicates that you are taking "spirit" there (in *Galatians* 3:2-3

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[¶11.3–¶11.5]) as referring to receiving the Holy Spirit (the more traditional reading). Seen in this context, and given the connection between *Galatians* 3:14 [¶13.8] and *Galatians* 3:2-3 [¶11.3–¶11.5], what causes you to decide to move away from taking "promise of the spirit" in *Galatians* 3:14 [¶13.8] in line with how you took "spirit" in *Galatians* 3:2-3 [¶11.3–¶11.5]?

F. **RESPONSE to Question #3:**

1. Note that my translation of the question contained in *Galatians* 3:2–3 [¶11.3–¶11.5] differs from the the translation given in the question:
  - a. Not, "did you receive the Spirit by works, or by faith?"
  - b. Rather, "did you receive the Spirit following a message about works of *Torah*, or following a message about belief?"
    - (1) Note that the Greek text that the question translates "or by faith" in *Galatians* 3:2–3 [¶11.3–¶11.5] reads as follows: *ek* a message [*akoes*] of belief = ἡ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως.
      - (A) The noun *akoe*, in my estimation, does not denote an action (the act of hearing). It denotes a thing (a message, a report, an announcement).
2. My contention is that the point of the paragraph [¶11, *Gal.* 3:1–5] is **not** to explain on what basis the Spirit of God was imparted to them. The point of the paragraph is to remind them that his gospel of *dikaiosune* being granted to those who believe in Jesus *was authenticated by the work of the Spirit of God* (that is, by **miracles**). What was authenticated for them by the work of the Spirit of God (that is, by miracles), was not the message that Law-keeping is necessary for everyone (both Jews AND GENTILES); rather, it was the message that belief in Jesus is sufficient for a person to be granted *dikaiosune* and the blessing of eternal Life.
3. So, in *Galatians* 3:6 ff [PART 7, ¶12-13], Paul has moved on to an entirely new and different purpose. He is no longer talking about what message it was that was authenticated by miracles. And neither is he talking about upon what basis the Holy Spirit will be imparted. What is he talking about? First, he is talking about what *condition* is attached to the blessing of Abraham in the original promise that God made to him (namely, *belief*). And, secondly, he is talking about the *basis* upon which that blessing of Abraham is to be granted (namely, on the basis of a *connection to Jesus the Messiah*).
  - a. He then ends PART 7 by summing up both the *condition* placed on the blessing of Abraham and the *basis* for it in one brief statement:
    - (1) "As a result, the blessing of Abraham comes to Gentiles *who are in Messiah Jesus* [THE BASIS]. As a result, we receive the Spirit's promise [THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM] *through our belief* [THE CONDITION]."

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Reformation Fellowship – Handout #8

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- (A) We know from the *Genesis* account that the promise made to Abraham was made by *Yahweh*. Hence, Paul’s point here is that we receive *Yahweh’s* promise (made to Abraham) through our belief.
- (a) Hence, the Spirit’s promise [ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος {*epangelian tou pneumatos*}] = the promise of the Spirit = *Yahweh’s* promise = God’s promise.