

WHO'S CURSED—AND WHY? (GALATIANS 3:10–14)

NORMAN H. YOUNG

Avondale College, Cooranbong NSW 2265 Australia

The meaning of almost every phrase in Gal 3:10–14 is disputed. Scholars have very diverse opinions about the intended referent of ὅσοι . . . ἐξ ἔργων νόμου; why this group is under a curse; how Paul's proof text (Deut 27:26) supports his opening statement; whether there is an implied premise in his argument or not; what point he is hoping to make by juxtaposing Hab 2:4 with Lev 18:5; and whether the first person plurals refer exclusively to Jews or also include the Gentiles. This essay contends that the key to resolving these debated points is found in Paul's use of Deut 27:26 as a proof text. The problem is that his quotation appears to refute rather than support his own assertion. If this anomaly can be solved, most of the others will also be clarified.

I. Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν (Galatians 3:10a)

The general view is that ἔργα νόμου is a negative phrase. It is usually construed as a denunciation of Jewish legalism. J. B. Lightfoot paraphrases those "whose character is founded on works of law."¹ E. De W. Burton assures us that in 3:10 "the word νόμου is, as always in the phrase ἔργα νόμου, used in its legalistic sense."² More recent commentators such as F. F. Bruce and R. N. Longenecker write similarly of "those who rely on the law, or on their performance of the law, for their acceptance with God," and "relying on one's own observance of the law" for righteousness.³ Hans Hübner is particularly vehement in this

I would like to express my thanks to the anonymous *JBL* referees for their helpful suggestions.

¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (3d ed.; London/Cambridge: Macmillan, 1869) 137.

² E. De W. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1921) 163.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982) 157; R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990) 116.

regard, asserting that “those who rely on the works of the law’ . . . are such as understand their existence in the fulfilment of the requisite total of works of the Law which are to be added up together.”⁴ He goes on to say that “the basis of their existence is not constituted by their being rooted in God but rather . . . by the quantity of the individual works (of the Law) they have performed.”⁵

This view has been severely criticized as finding little or no support in the Jewish sources. It is claimed that the sources of Second Temple Judaism almost unanimously see the law as that which directs life in the covenant, not as the means of securing the covenantal relationship.⁶ Be that as it may, there are good reasons for accepting that “works of law’ are simply the works demanded by the Torah.”⁷ J. M. G. Barclay correctly notes that “the phrase is a purely neutral description of Torah-observance.”⁸ It may also “denote particularly those obligations of the law which were reckoned especially crucial in the maintenance of covenant righteousness.”⁹ Thus, ἔργα νόμου are not meritorious works, but rather those elements of the law that indicate a group’s distinguishing characteristic.¹⁰ When qualified by οἱ or ὅσοι, ἔργα νόμου is descriptive; a phrase more akin to “Baptist” or “Episcopalian” than to a derogatory term such as “legalist.”¹¹ It does, of course, refer to a Jewish way of religious life, but of itself it is a neutral term and “conveys nothing pejorative per se and should not be overinterpreted.”¹²

⁴ Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul’s Thought* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1984) 18.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This has been strongly argued by E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress; London: SCM, 1977) and in *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (London: SCM, 1985). For a forceful appraisal of Sanders’s positive view of Judaism and his distinction between “getting in” and “staying in,” see R. H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” *Bib* 66 (1985) 1–38.

⁷ Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (2d ed.; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987) 177. The genitive in ἔργα νόμου is objective—works done in conformity with the law. Lloyd Gaston’s attempt to construe it as a subjective genitive is unconvincing (*Paul and the Torah* [Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987] 100–106).

⁸ J. M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988) 82 n. 18. In Gyu Hong agrees with Barclay: “The works of the law’ do not have a negative meaning but a neutral denotation” (*The Law in Galatians* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993] 135; idem, “Does Paul Misrepresent the Jewish Law? Law and Covenant in Gal. 3:1–14,” *NovT* 36 [1994] 174).

⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Black’s NT Commentary; London: Black, 1993) 136.

¹⁰ J. B. Tyson, “Works of Law’ in Galatians,” *JBL* 92 (1973) 423–31, esp. 430–31.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10–14),” *NTS* 31 (1985) 527–28 (reprinted with an additional note in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* [London: SPCK, 1990] 219–21). See also Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 154–60; and Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 82–83.

¹² James M. Scott, “‘For as Many are of Works of the Law are under a Curse’ (Galatians 3.10),” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Sheffield: JSOT

The phrase ὅσοι . . . ἐξ ἔργων is no more pejorative than equivalent terms that Paul uses to distinguish the Jews from the Gentiles.¹³ For example, οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς (Gal 2:12; Rom 4:12; Col 4:11); οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον (1 Cor 9:20; Gal 4:5); ὅσοι/οἱ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (Rom 2:12; 3:19); οἱ ἐκ νόμου (Rom 4:14) and οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ (Rom 9:6). These are simply graphic expressions for a Jewish community that saw its *raison d'être* in the Sinai covenant and its law. Of course, the pronoun ὅσοι should not be read simply as the equivalent of the definite article οἱ.¹⁴ Paul's use of ὅσοι in Galatians and elsewhere would indicate that Paul is not restricting those ἐξ ἔργων νόμου to the Jews. Paul's use of ὅσοι is generalized and comes close to meaning "whoever": "whoever of you were baptized" (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27); "whoever wishes to appear well" (Gal 6:12); "whoever will regulate themselves" (Gal 6:16); "whoever is led by the Spirit" (Rom 8:14); "whoever is mature" (Phil 3:15); "whoever has not seen me personally" (Col 2:1).

Thus we conclude that the phrase ὅσοι . . . ἐξ ἔργων νόμου is not pejorative and does not denounce legalism, but refers to those, whether Jew or Gentile, who define their group identity through deeds determined by the nationalistic covenant of Sinai.¹⁵ They very clearly contrast with οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (Gal 3:7, 10), who find their identity through faith in Christ.

II. Ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν (Galatians 3:10b)

Those who argue for an implied premise in Paul's reasoning in Gal 3:10 maintain that without it there is no logical relationship between Paul's opening statement and the Deuteronomic text that he quotes to support it. The conjunction between Paul's proof text (Deut 27:26) and his conclusion is usually expressed as a syllogism:

All who do not keep the law perfectly are cursed (Deut 27:26 cited in Gal 3:10b).

No one can keep the law perfectly (implied premise).

Therefore, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse (Gal 3:10a).¹⁶

Press, 1993) 190; so also Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 82 n. 18. D. J. Moo accepts that works of the law "indicate commendable actions, performed in obedience to the law," but he goes on to say that nobody can do them in sufficient degree to gain merit before God ("Law", 'Works of the Law', and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 [1983] 96–98).

¹³ Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 120–21.

¹⁴ An observation correctly made by Christopher D. Stanley, "'Under a Curse': A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10–14," *NTS* 36 (1990) 498.

¹⁵ For a thorough defense of the "legalism view," see T. R. Schreiner, "'Works of Law' in Paul," *NovT* 33 (1991) 217–44. Schreiner's views are now conveniently found in his *Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

¹⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible? A Re-Examination of Galatians 3:10," *JETS* 27 (1984) 151; idem, "Paul and Perfect Obedience to the Law: An Evaluation

This certainly makes sense of Paul's proof text: γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά (v. 10c = Deut 27:26). If ὅσοι . . . ἐξ ἔργων νόμου refers to all those who attempt to observe the law, whether legalistically or not, an implied premise is required to preserve Paul's logical coherence. Without such an implicit premise, we are left with Paul saying that those who keep the law are under a curse because the law pronounces a curse on everyone who does not keep all its requirements. If this is what Paul is saying, then his argument is a hopeless non sequitur. True, there is a clear contrast with vv. 6–9—οἱ ἐκ πίστεως/ὅσοι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου; ἐνευλογηθήσονται, εὐλογοῦνται/κατάραν, ἐπικατάρατος—but this does not relieve the tension within v. 10 itself, that is, between the point being made and the text quoted to prove it.¹⁷ Of course, if we accept with Räisänen that Paul is himself inconsistent, then the tension between v. 10ab and v. 10c as they stand is simply a quirk of the author's style.¹⁸ However, Räisänen's position is needlessly pessimistic. It is reasonable to assume that Paul is making logical sense.

Further evidence for the presence of an unstated premise in the argument is adduced from the fact that Paul retains the LXX's addition of πᾶσιν to the MT of Deut 27:26 (דְּבַר יְהוָה הַזֶּה). Paul also adapts the LXX's rendering by replacing ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ νόμου τούτου with πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου (cf. Deut 29:21, 27). This modification of the LXX text is interpreted to mean that "Paul extends the application of Deut 27:26a to the whole OT law. For him the failure to obey any prescript of the Torah incurs a curse."¹⁹ Advocates of the implied premise also point out that the concluding admonition, τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά, "identifies the problem as a failure 'to do' . . . what the law commands."²⁰ It should be noted that τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά acts as a positive reinforcement of the preceding admonition, πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει, and confirms the impression that Paul is emphasizing the necessity for those ἐξ ἔργων νόμου to fulfill all the requirements of the Torah.

of the View of E. P. Sanders," *WTJ* 47 (1985) 247; idem, *Law and Its Fulfillment*, 44; also Michael Cranford, "The Possibility of Perfect Obedience: Paul and an Implied Premise in Galatians 3:10 and 5:3," *NovT* 36 (1994) 242–58.

¹⁷ Stanley quotes Luther effectively to demonstrate the tension between Paul's statement and his text: "Now these two sentences of Paul and Moses seem clean contrary. Paul saith: Whoever shall do the works of the law, is accursed. Moses saith: Whoever shall not do the works of the law is accursed. How shall the two sayings be reconciled together? Or else (which is more) how shall the one be proved by the other?" ("A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10–14," 481).

¹⁸ Heikki Räisänen, "Paul's Theological Difficulties with the Law," *Studia Biblica* 1978: III, *Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors* (Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) 301–20, esp. 305. Räisänen himself accepts the hypothesis of an unstated premise (*Paul and the Law*, 94–96).

¹⁹ Hong, "Does Paul Misrepresent the Jewish Law?" 175; idem, *Law in Galatians*, 139.

²⁰ Schreiner, *Law and Its Fulfillment*, 45.

One gains the strong impression that Paul quotes Deut 27:26 to clinch his initial statement and not simply because the text conveniently conjoins νόμος with ἐπικατάρατος.²¹ Cranford rightly observes that “it is all the more unlikely that Paul would overlook the significance of πᾶσιν when its inclusion places the first and last parts of 3:10 in direct conflict.” He notes also that Gal 5:3 and 5:14 suggest “that Paul’s inclusion of πᾶσιν in 3:10 had significance.”²²

There are, of course, some weighty arguments against the implied premise thesis, and this has led many to reject it.²³ First, the implied premise view assumes as a matter of fact that ἐργα νόμου refers to an attempt to obey the whole law without failure.²⁴ But Judaism made no such demand. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that Judaism had a robust understanding of repentance and forgiveness quite apart from the temple cult.²⁵ Second, there is no hint in Deuteronomy, in Paul, or in Judaism that the law required an impossible perfection. To suggest that any human shortcoming immediately attracted the law’s curse is really an unlikely proposal once the historical realities are considered.

N. T. Wright has sought to avoid such criticisms by arguing that Israel as a nation lived under the continuing curse of the exile. He emphasizes that the curse refers to Israel as a whole and not to the sins of individuals. The curse was Israel’s “subjugation at the hands of pagans.” The syllogism then reads:

- a. Israel as a whole is under the curse if she fails to keep Torah.
- b. Israel as a whole failed to keep Torah (implied premise).
- c. Therefore Israel is under the curse (of pagan dominance or exile).²⁶

²¹ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 21.

²² Cranford, “Possibility of Perfect Obedience,” 246–47.

²³ These are conveniently summarized in Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 170–71.

²⁴ Hübner, *Law in Paul’s Thought*, 19; and for a rejoinder, see Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 137–38, esp. n. 61. Francis Watson argues that the insistence on perfect fulfillment of the law is Paul’s, not his opponents (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986] 71).

²⁵ Some (e.g., Sanders, Dunn, and G. Howard) think that the sacrificial cult preserved Judaism from any notion that the law placed Israel under an irremediable curse (Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 157–82; idem, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 27; J. D. G. Dunn, “Yet Once More—‘The Works of the Law’: A Response,” *JSNT* 46 [1992] 109; G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979] 53). In reaction, Hong correctly points out that for Paul the cult was an inadequate means of atonement (*Law in Galatians*, 141). Nevertheless, Hong’s observation does not alter the fact that Judaism was aware of the necessity for continuing divine forgiveness and, accordingly, did not live under the burden of failing to fulfill the law perfectly.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991) 146–47. Scott and Frank Thielman seem to defend a similar view (Scott, “For as Many as are of Works of the Law are under a Curse,” 221; Frank Thielman, *From Plight to Solution* [Leiden: Brill, 1989] 72; idem, *A Contextual Approach: Paul and the Law* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994] 127).

However, Wright produces no evidence to show that Diaspora Jews felt they were under the Deuteronomic curse. Since we have argued that ὅσοι (v. 10a) cannot be limited to Jews, it is difficult to see how Wright's reconstruction would be relevant to Gentile (i.e., Galatian) Christians living in their own Hellenistic environment. The curse in Galatians has an immediate urgency that does not comport well with the idea of a historical and national curse. Paul's own historical situation is what really shapes his argument in Galatians.

A person does not incur the law's curse for inevitable infringements, since these are covered by repentance, but for the purposeful abandonment of any of the covenant's demands. As Daniel Fuller points out "what is characteristic of the eleven crimes listed in Deuteronomy 27:15–25 is that each implied an open and flagrant renunciation of the law which God had given."²⁷ It is just such a conscious abandonment of some of the law's requirements that Paul is advocating; and this is a quite different situation from those inevitable infringements that are due to human frailty. An abandonment of such covenantal stipulations as circumcision and holy days was especially relevant for Gentile Christians, but it also involved Jewish believers. Paul states quite openly that certain elements of the law are no longer obligatory practices for covenant membership, εἰ γὰρ ἂ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ . . . (Gal 2:18). Καταλύω and οἰκοδομῶ are the same terms Jesus used in his sayings against the Temple, and it is likely that Paul also is referring to practices that relate to Israel's election and cultic identity.²⁸

The Judaizers' reaction to this was no doubt to accuse Paul of neglecting the law (καταλύω), of being a transgressor, of making Christ an agent of sin (Gal 2:17), and thus of putting his converts under the law's curse (Gal 3:10). Paul answers the charge of 2:17 with a denial and a reversal. First, he dismisses the thought that Christ is a minister (διάκονος, 2:17) of sin. Second, he asserts that if he were to reintroduce the elements of the law that he had abandoned, he would then make himself a transgressor (παραβάτης, 2:18). The enigmatic τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη (Gal 3:19) seems to mean that the law had the exclusive role of defining what constituted transgression until Christ came.²⁹ Thus, in the thinking of those ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, the law defined transgression, and abandoning it (καταλύω, 2:18), not simply the occasional lapse,

²⁷ Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 93. Fuller himself takes "works of the law" to refer to legalistic bribery of God ("Paul and the 'Works of the Law,'" *WTJ* 38 [1975–76] 28–42). For a criticism of Fuller from a dispensational perspective, see W. G. Strickland, "Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller's Law-Gospel Continuum," *BSac* 144 (1987) 186–93.

²⁸ F. Hahn, "Das Gesetzverständnis im Römer- und Galaterbrief," *ZNW* 67 (1976) 53–54 n. 76.

²⁹ David J. Lull, "'The Law was our Pedagogue': A Study in Galatians 3:19–25," *JBL* 105 (1986) 481–98.

made one a transgressor, which placed one under the law's curse.³⁰ Paul agreed with this logic within the Mosaic national covenant, but not in the time of Christ (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ὃ ἐπὶγγελεται, 3:19b). Paul's reference to the provisional nature of the Mosaic law in his periodization argument of Galatians 3–4 “means that the Mosaic law in terms of the Mosaic *covenant* has ceased.”³¹ Thus, the law is no longer the final word in defining transgression (παράβασις, v. 19), a role it monopolized only until the promised seed came (v. 19).

How then would building up again what he had destroyed make Paul a transgressor? This is an especially acute question when it is recalled that in Paul's writings the παράβασις word group always refers to the breach of a known law. Jan Lambrecht has plausibly suggested that for Paul reinstating the divisions of the Mosaic law against the Gentiles would transgress the law to love one's neighbor (5:14), the law of Christ (6:2).³² However, Paul may equally mean that if he were to reestablish the Sinai covenant, he would make himself a transgressor of the Mosaic law, since he was not requiring his Gentile converts to be circumcised. But Paul denies that his action is transgression because now that Jesus, the promised seed, has come, transgression is defined primarily by reference to him rather than by reference to the Sinai covenant.

The Judaizers' charge (that Paul's ignoring of parts of the law puts the Gentile believers under the law's curse) lies behind Gal 3:10–14. Indeed, 3:10–19 is an expansion of his debate in 2:15–17 as to what constitutes transgression. Gal 3:10–13 is thus as much an apologetic as it is a polemic.³³ Part of Paul's defense is to charge the Judaizers with being pre-Christ in their thinking and with having an inadequate apprehension of the difference the Christ-event has made to covenant membership and the definition of transgression (2:21; 3:19).

Thus, the problem for the Judaizers is Paul's conscious ignoring of certain of the law's requirements rather than their own or anyone else's inability to keep the whole law. But should Sanders and Dunn be followed when they entirely dispense with the idea of an implied premise? Their own interpretations are less than convincing. Sanders's basic position is that since for Paul righteousness is by faith in Christ, it cannot be by the law. Hence, the problem

³⁰ “Καταλύειν is almost a technical term for abandoning the law” (Heikki Räisänen, “Galatians 2.16 and Paul's Break with Judaism,” *NTS* 31 [1985] 548; reprinted in *Jesus, Paul and Torah* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992] 121–22).

³¹ T. R. Schreiner, “The Abolition and Fulfillment of the Law in Paul,” *JSNT* 35 (1989) 55–56.

³² Jan Lambrecht, “Transgressor by Nullifying God's Grace: A Study of Gal 2,18–21,” *Bib* 72 (1991) 217–36.

³³ B. H. Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 42–55; *pace* Hong, *Law in Galatians*, 99.

with the law is not that it cannot be fulfilled, but that it is not Christ.³⁴ Dunn, on the other hand, argues that confidence in a favored national status based on the “identity markers” of the law led Judaism to an exclusivism that transgressed the true inclusive intention of the law. Consequently, Jews were under the curse of the law because their restrictive attitude transgressed the openness of the covenant law.³⁵

Given the struggle that Sanders and Dunn have had in attempting to give an alternative to the assumed-premise hypothesis, perhaps another look at the implied-premise view is warranted.³⁶ Rather than demanding the abandonment of the idea altogether, the objections of Sanders and Dunn indicate that the terms of the implied premise need modification. Advocates of an implied premise usually introduce a causal sentence, but Paul’s argument seems to require an unexpressed condition. Paul’s argument is clarified if instead of the implied premise—“*because* no one can keep the law perfectly,” or “*because* Israel as a whole failed to keep Torah”—we suppose the unexpressed condition “*if* those ἐξ ἑργῶν νόμου do not do all the requirements of the law.” The objections raised against the causal form of the implied premise do not apply to the unexpressed condition view.

Paul admits that anyone who belongs to the Mosaic covenant comes under the curse of the law, *if they abandon any of the covenant’s requirements*. The law itself states that those who do not remain within its stipulations are cursed (Deut 27:26).³⁷ The unexpressed condition is not an independent sentence but a qualification of Paul’s opening statement (v. 10a) that is demanded by his use of Deut 27:26. Hence, Paul is referring not to an actual situation when he speaks of being under a curse but to a potential consequence.³⁸ The use of the present copula verb εἶσιν in v. 10a does not contradict this, because it must be read as part of an integrated argument, including Paul’s proof text.³⁹ That is to

³⁴ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 26–27. Sanders is followed by R. B. Hays (*The Faith of Jesus Christ* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983] 206–7). For critiques of Sanders, see Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” 1–38, esp. 27–28; and Thielman, *From Plight to Solution*, 59–72.

³⁵ Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 174–75.

³⁶ Dunn recognizes that Gal 3:10–14 is the litmus test of the validity of his sociological approach. His various attempts at passing the test have been unsuccessful (see “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law” and “Yet Once More—‘The Works of the Law’: A Response”).

³⁷ Deut 27:26 was probably a key verse in the Judaizers’ armory (C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians* [London: SPCK, 1985] 27; B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* [London: SCM, 1961] 230).

³⁸ Stanley argues that Paul is talking not about “some universal ‘curse’ that has already fallen upon sinful humanity as a whole” but about the “negative potentiality” associated with Torah-observance” (“A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10–14,” 506).

³⁹ Pace Schreiner, *Law and Its Fulfillment*, 58 n. 52.

say, they are under a curse, if they do not continue in all that is written in the book of the law to do them.⁴⁰ Paul's argument can now be set out:

<i>statement:</i>	As many as function from the Mosaic covenant and its requirements are under a curse,
<i>unexpressed condition:</i>	if they abandon any of that covenant's laws,
<i>textual proof:</i>	because the Torah itself pronounces a curse on anyone who does not adhere to all its requirements.

This conjunction makes sense of Paul's proof text, and it gives *παῖσιν* significance without introducing the dubious assumption that it is impossible to keep the law perfectly. The *παῖσιν* affirms that members of the Sinai covenant have no right to renegotiate any of its parts. Paul thus accepts the validity of the Judaizers' argument; what he challenges is the necessity for Christians to identify with their premise. If Paul's Gentile converts had been incorporated into the Sinai covenant, then truly they would risk the law's curse, if they purposefully ignored any of its demands such as circumcision. Thus, the Judaizers' charge that Paul's teaching brings the Gentile Christians under the law's curse is true only within their Sinaitic terms of reference, not Paul's christological stance.⁴¹

Paul's final assault on his opponents is to charge them with inconsistency. They appeal to the Mosaic law in urging the Galatians to be circumcised but do not themselves keep the whole law (6:13), which on their own admission would bring them under the curse of the law. In Paul's opinion their own premise did not allow them to "pick and choose bits of the law to keep."⁴² In what sense were the Judaizers not observing the whole law? Was their position simply an arbitrary and "random selection" of commandments from Israel's legal tradition?⁴³ Or was it a process of evangelistic pragmatism designed to lead the Gentile convert gradually to a full acceptance of the law?⁴⁴ We may presume

⁴⁰ Paul's use of *ὑπό* in Galatians supports this. He speaks of being under the control, power, or jurisdiction of "sin" (3:22), "law" (3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18), "pedagogue" (3:25), "guardians and stewards" (4:2), "basic structures of the world" (4:3). These are all spheres of control within which a person functions (cf. Rom 6:14, 15; 7:14). To be under the curse of the law does not mean to be under some actual penalty, but to be living in the sphere where the curse of the law is operative.

⁴¹ Michael Winger says that *ἐξ ἔργων νόμου* was originally the Judaizers' phrase, and for Paul is equivalent to *Ἰουδαϊκῶς* (*By What Law? The Meaning of Νόμος in the Letters of Paul* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992] 137).

⁴² John Ziesler, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1992) 40.

⁴³ Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents*, 119, quoting Marcus Barth. However, Watson denies that the Judaizers advocated a selective keeping of the law (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 71).

⁴⁴ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 29.

that they had at least abandoned the sacrificial and priestly elements of the law, and that that would have been sufficient grounds for Paul to protest against their appeal to the Sinai covenant as the final arbiter in establishing who constituted the people of God.

Paul further reminds his converts that submitting to circumcision commits them to observing the whole law without distinction (5:3).⁴⁵ Failure to do so, if one places oneself under the law, brings the law's curse. Paul's argument then in v. 10 is that those who live a religious life as defined by the law of Moses are not free to neglect any of its requirements. To live ἐξ ἔργων νόμου meant that one accepted the law's sanctions against transgressors of any of its requirements. Being ὑπὸ κατάραν meant not that every adherent of the law was *ipso facto* cursed but that an acceptance of the Mosaic law as the supreme authority in religious matters meant at the same time an acceptance of the law's authority to pronounce a curse on those who deliberately abandoned any of its requirements.

Paul had now to demonstrate how he himself could neglect such demands as circumcision, holy days, and perhaps food laws, teach others to do the same, and yet not come under the curse of the law.

III. Ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον (Galatians 3:11a)

"In the law" clearly refers to the "works of the law."⁴⁶ The "no one" follows the inclusive language that we saw with Paul's use of ὅσοι in v. 10. In Jewish thought δικαιοῦται had reference to the covenant relationship with God. Putting this altogether, it means that neither Jew nor Gentile is able to live as the people of God by means of works of the law. Why not? The frequent answer is to say because no one can keep the law, or alternatively, even if they could keep it, justification is by faith.⁴⁷ Both of these explanations, as we have seen, have problems.

Verse 11 is grounded in v. 10 and must accordingly be understood in the same way. Since we have argued that v. 10 is explicated by the assumption of an unexpressed condition, it follows that the same is true of v. 11. A paraphrase clarifies Paul's reasoning: "it is clear that no one can be a member of the people

⁴⁵ Winger says that "Gal 5:3 indicates that the Teachers were not advocating strict obedience to every commandment. It is left to Paul to observe that νόμος is a whole: you cannot be half-Jewish, either you are a Jew or you are not" (*By What Law?* 138 n. 60). However, Cranford goes too far in arguing that the Judaizers offered circumcision "as sufficient in and of itself" ("Possibility of Perfect Obedience," 255).

⁴⁶ G. Walter Hansen argues that ἐν is not instrumental but "expresses the primary orientation of life, the sphere of existence" (*Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989] 121).

⁴⁷ Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 23; Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 160.

of God by works of the law, *while at the same time abandoning any of the Sinai covenant's stipulations*, therefore, those who are righteous by faith will live out their life in the covenant by faith, and not by works of the law." I have not accepted in this paraphrase Thielman's contention that δῆλον goes with what follows rather than with what precedes.⁴⁸ However, I agree that v. 11a is the conclusion of v. 10. Paul now supports his statement in v. 11a with two contrasting proof texts that link with his use of Deut 27:26 in v. 10c.

IV. Ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (Galatians 3:12)

Those who advocate the law as *the* authority in religious matters incur a curse, if they do not observe all its requirements (τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά [= ἔργα νόμου]—a purpose infinitive). This declaration of v. 10c is reinforced in vv. 11–12 by quoting Hab 2:4 and juxtaposing Lev 18:15 with it:

ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως	ζήσεται [ἐν αὐτῇ] (v. 11b)
ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ [= ἔργα νόμου]	ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (v. 12b). ⁴⁹

Thus, Paul uses the two texts to make the point that *those who are righteous from faith will live their lives by faith, but those who do the works of the law will live their lives by them*.⁵⁰ The ποιήσας (v. 12b) repeats the ποιῆσαι of v. 10c and emphasizes that those who belong to the jurisdiction of the law must do the works of the law and live within them; whereas those of faith live within its boundaries. Thus, v. 12, like v. 10, is claiming not that it is impossible to keep the law but that those under its jurisdiction are cursed if they intentionally depart from living by all of its requirements.⁵¹

Contrariwise, those who belong to faith may ignore certain elements of the law with impunity because transgression is defined for them by reference to the death of Christ.⁵² The law's demarcation of Israel from the Gentiles and its centering the covenant exclusively in Israel have been abolished in the redemptive death of Christ. The law cannot pronounce a curse on either Christian Jews

⁴⁸ Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 127.

⁴⁹ Following Stanley's positioning, though I have added αὐτῇ rather than his αὐτῷ as the antecedent is surely the feminine πίστις ("A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10–14," 504 n. 60). Both lines refer to a human response, not a divine and human one as Howard maintains (*Paul: Crisis in Galatia*, 63–64).

⁵⁰ "The difference between Hab. ii.4 and Lev. xviii.5 is that the former talks of a relationship lived out on the basis of faith, whereas the latter has the more limited purview of doing the law and of living within its terms" (Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 175).

⁵¹ Dunn, "Yet Once More—The Works of the Law: A Response," 115–16. This was probably what the Judaizers claimed (U. Wilckens, "Statements on the Development of Paul's View of the Law," in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett* [ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982] 21).

⁵² Of course, because faith is not obliged to do "all the things written in the book of the law" does not mean that it is not bound to do any of them.

or Gentiles when they eat together, neglect the Torah's ritual calendar, or fail to circumcise their offspring, because such things are transgressions only within the Sinai covenant law, not within the faith of Christ.⁵³

The link between vv. 11–12 and v. 10 means that the latter verse must be seen as stating a general truth and not merely a historical reference to the nation of Israel. Paul is addressing anyone who thought that circumcision was a nonnegotiable requirement for covenant identity. For Paul, whether a person was circumcised or not was neither here nor there (5:6; 6:15). Circumcision did not mean an automatic inclusion into the Abrahamic covenant, and uncircumcision did not imply an automatic exclusion from it.

V. Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου
(Galatians 3:13)⁵⁴

The customary view is that in Gal 3:13 Paul is making a profound statement about the atoning benefits of the cross; the major benefit being deliverance from the law's pronouncement of a curse on the transgressor.⁵⁵ Others have limited Paul's statement to "a way of escape for the *Gentiles* from the 'negative potentiality' associated with Torah-observance."⁵⁶ If what we have contended so far is correct, then Paul is assuring his readers that Christ's death has delivered them from the law's ability or authority to curse them for abandoning some of its requirements. This means that the first person plural pronouns in v. 13 (ἡμᾶς, ἡμῶν) cannot be limited to Jews.⁵⁷ Christ's death has delivered those of faith from the law's power to curse those who do not abide by its covenantal regulations. Thus for Paul "how Gentiles incurred the curse of the law" is a nonquestion.⁵⁸ Paul's concern is not the deliverance of the Gentiles from their

⁵³ Gaston denies that Jews were forbidden to eat with Gentiles (*Paul and the Torah*, 68 and 209 n.10). However, see J. D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2.11–18)," *JSNT* 18 (1983) 3–57 (reprinted with an additional note in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 129–241). See further discussions in P. J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990) 230–36; E. P. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2.11–14," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honour of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 170–88; idem, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 236–42, 272–83.

⁵⁴ The genitive νόμου is subjective, the curse that issues from the law (Hong, *Law in Galatians*, 79).

⁵⁵ F. F. Bruce, "The Curse of the Law," in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett*, 27–36.

⁵⁶ Stanley, "A Fresh Reading of Galatians 3.10–14," 506; Joseph P. Braswell, "'The Blessing of Abraham' versus 'the Curse of the Law': Another Look at Gal 3:10–13," *WTJ* 53 (1991) 75–79.

⁵⁷ Pace T. L. Donaldson, "The 'Curse of the Law' and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3.13–14," *NTS* 32 (1986) 94–112. Further see W. J. Dalton, "The Meaning of 'We' in Galatians," *AusBR* 38 (1990) 33–44; Norman H. Young, "Pronominal Shifts in Paul's Argument to the Galatians" (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians*, 123.

past condemnation but rather the freeing of them in the present from any obligation to accept the authority of the nationalistic Sinai covenant, and thus to undergo circumcision.

A major purpose or result (ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη . . . γένηται, v. 14a) of Christ's death was to incorporate the Gentiles as Gentiles (that is, without circumcision) into the covenantal promise made to Abraham. The cross made it possible for Gentiles to be members of the people of God and to receive the Spirit (ἵνα . . . λάβωμεν, v. 14b).⁵⁹ Yet, though uncircumcised, they are not cursed by the law. Why not? Because faith in Christ, the one who was put to death and was raised from the dead, defines the people of God and not the Sinai covenant.

VI. Conclusion

The argument we have attempted to present in this paper is best clarified with a loose paraphrase of Gal 3:10–14:

- v. 10 Whoever makes the Sinai covenantal law their way of life comes under a curse (if they deliberately abandon any of its precepts); for scripture itself pronounces a curse on anyone who claims to be under the law's jurisdiction and yet abandons some of its requirements.
- v. 11a Hence it is clear that no one can belong to the people of God on the basis of the Sinai law/covenant while blatantly abandoning any of its requirements.
- v. 11b Therefore, those who become members of the people of God by faith must continue to direct their lives by faith
- v. 12 and not by the Mosaic covenant, which requires a person to live by *all* its stipulations (hence the hypocrisy of the Judaizers, who claim Sinai's authority in support of their case for circumcision but do not themselves keep all the law's requirements; see 6:13).
- v. 13 Christ's death on the cross has released us—those of faith—from the Sinai covenant's ability or right to curse us for abandoning such requirements as circumcision and holy days,
- v. 14 with the result that Gentiles, without incurring the law's curse, are now able to receive the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit, even though they are uncircumcised.

From this it becomes clear that Gal 3:10–14 is as much Paul's defense of his own position as it is a polemic against the Judaizers' view.⁶⁰ Paul is here addressing the charge that his gospel promoted transgression and thus placed

⁵⁹ S. K. Williams, "Promise in Galatians: A Reading of Paul's Reading of Scripture," *JBL* 107 (1988) 709–20, esp. 720.

⁶⁰ Hong argues to the contrary that Galatians is not apologetic (*Law in Galatians*, 99).

his Gentile converts under the curse of the law. Paul agrees with the Judaizers that those who belong to the Sinai covenant are obliged to fulfill all its demands. If such persons did not do so, he admits, they would invite the curse of the law. What Paul disputes is that those who live by faith in Christ come under the jurisdiction of the Sinai covenantal arrangement. Since those of faith are outside Sinai's jurisdiction, Paul's failure to circumcise his Gentile converts does not place them under the curse of the law. The death of Christ has brought the original promise to Abraham into play, and this has introduced a new salvific era that includes the Gentiles within the covenant community. In Galatians 5–6 Paul makes it clear that this new faith situation does not encourage pagan immorality nor, indeed, oppose the moral injunctions of the law. But this is to go beyond the parameters of this essay.

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.