

JUSTIFICATION AND THE SPIRIT IN GALATIANS

Sam K. Williams

The Colorado College
Colorado Springs, CO 80903, USA

Like most of his letters, Galatians is Paul's response to a problem situation that he could not immediately address in person. After leaving the territory of Galatia, having founded several churches there, Paul learned that other Christians were preaching to the Galatian believers a 'different gospel' (1.6-7). Apparently they were arguing that Paul had neglected to make clear that circumcision and Torah observance were necessary in order to belong to the people of God. Alongside the question of Paul's apostolic authority, a central issue was: Who are the true sons of Abraham?

In his argument that those persons who live on the basis of faith are the true sons of Abraham, 'be justified' and 'the Spirit' play central roles. In their analysis of Pauline theology, New Testament scholars tend to treat these as separate and distinct topics. Gal. 3.14, however, suggests that in Paul's mind the two are closely bound to each other in some way that is not at once apparent and which therefore needs to be clarified.

Gal. 3.14 consists of two *hina* clauses which give the purpose of Christ's redeeming us from the curse of the Law: 'in order that through Jesus Christ the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith'. The second of these clauses could be dependent upon the first. It is far more likely, however, that both *hina* clauses depend upon the main clause, 'Christ redeemed us...', and therefore parallel each other.¹ This view might appear to be undermined by the fact that in the first clause 'the Gentiles' are the beneficiaries of Christ's act, whereas in the second 'we' are the beneficiaries. I contend, however, that throughout vv. 13-14 Paul has in mind all Christians. Those whom Christ has redeemed from the curse of the Law are not only Jews but also Gentiles, who apart from Christ

would have had to live 'under the Law' in order to belong to the people of God. Although in v. 14 Paul speaks of *ta ethnē* (rather than *hēmas*) in part for rhetorical variety, his more important reason is to *emphasize* that God's justification, which had long been claimed by Israel, is *now* available to the Gentiles. By contrast, the eschatological gift of the Spirit was a novel happening for Jew and Gentile; thus the 'we' (i.e. all Christians, Jews and Gentiles) of v. 14b. In light of Gal. 2.15-16, I note the senselessness of holding that *hē eulogia tou Abraam*—which, as I will shortly argue, means being justified by God—is now available *only* to Gentiles. Although Paul does not explicitly say so in 3.14, the blessing of Abraham is now possible 'in Jesus Christ' for Gentiles *and Jews*. Likewise, the 'we' who receive the promise of the Spirit are both Jewish and Gentile believers.

The phrase *hē epaggelia tou pneumatos* means, of course, not the promise that the Spirit would be given in the future but the promised spirit, the Spirit which had been promised and was now being 'supplied' to the Galatian Christians (3.5).² The meaning of the phrase *hē eulogia tou Abraam* might not be so immediately clear. At any rate, commentators do not always agree.³ There is no good reason for such diversity of opinion, though. In 3.8 Paul has already defined the blessing in terms of justification. There the divine assurance that 'in' Abraham all the Gentiles would be *blessed* is grounded in the divine intention to *justify* the Gentiles by faith. Thus it is persons who live on the basis of faith who are blessed along with believing Abraham (3.9)—that is, in the same way that Abraham was blessed. And how was that? He was justified on the basis of his faith: 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness' (3.6). In spite of scholarly views to the contrary, there can be no doubt that 'the blessing of Abraham' refers specifically to the status of being justified, reckoned righteous, by God. But this recognition poses sharply the question: What is the relationship to each other of the two *hina* clauses of Gal. 3.14? Or to ask the question in terms of theology rather than sentence structure: What is the relationship between being justified and receiving the promised Spirit?

That there *is* a significant relationship of some sort is suggested already by the juxtaposition of Gal. 3.5 and 3.6. Even though we can say that in 3.2-5 Paul appeals to the Galatians' own experience of the Spirit and then, appealing to the witness of Scripture, he begins in 3.6 another step of his argument, I contend that 3.5 and 3.6 should not be sharply separated. There is an important connection between

the two verses. That connection is evidenced, first of all, by the word *kathōs*, a term that gives translators no little trouble. H.D. Betz takes it as an introductory formula, an abbreviation of *kathōs gegrapται*, and thus translates, 'As it is written'; but his case is damaged by the admission that '... this abbreviated formula occurs only here in Paul'.⁴ The NEB skirts the problem altogether with the translation, 'Look at Abraham...'; and the NIV, in similar fashion, reads, 'Consider Abraham: "He believed God..."'.⁵

In order to decide how to render *kathōs*, one must first answer this question: Are Gal. 3.6 and 3.7 two separate sentences or is 3.6 the protasis and 3.7 the apodosis of a single sentence? In the latter case, Paul would be saying, 'Just as Abraham believed . . . , so then you can be sure . . .'. This is possible, but other instances in Galatians where *ara* introduces the apodosis of a conditional sentence make it improbable; for in those other instances (Gal. 2.21; 3.29; 5.11) the protasis is an if-clause and *ara* is the first word of the apodosis, whereas Gal. 3.7 begins with *kathōs* and *ara* is the *second* word of v. 7. It is preferable, therefore, to consider Gal. 3.6 and 3.7 two separate sentences. But in that case, since *kathōs* is not syntactically dependent on v. 7, it must be *conceptually* dependent on v. 5. That is, the quotation from Genesis in 3.6 somehow supports Paul's point in 3.5. More specifically, Paul is pointing to the similarity of Abraham's experience and the Galatians' experience. For this similarity to be clear, the reader has to 'hear' the unavoidable answer which intervenes between Paul's question in 3.5 and his assertion in 3.6. That answer would be: 'It is, of course, on the basis of faith that God supplies the Spirit and works wonders among us'.

The similarity between Abraham's experience and the Galatians' can be described more precisely. In both cases we find a pattern familiar to any attentive reader of the Bible: divine initiative, human response, divine blessing. The three components of this pattern now require elaboration.

Abraam episteusen tō theō does not describe a vague, ill-defined belief in God. Rather, as the reader of Genesis knows, Abraham believed God *as* the deity revealed his purpose in a particular word, the promise of descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15.1-5). Similarly, the Christian believes God *as* he has revealed his purpose in a particular word, the gospel of Christ crucified (Gal. 3.1). For both Abraham and the Christian the experience of life in faith *begins* on the God-ward side, for God takes the initiative and sets the redemptive event in motion.

Gen. 15.5-6 (LXX) reads: "Then he said, "So shall your *sperma* be". And *Abram* believed God". Abraham's believing was a *response* to God's speaking. This response was, in the first place, a kind of *hearing*, and the word which Abraham heard came from God. Hearing is always a passive act, for that which is heard always comes from beyond the self. At the same time, hearing is always active; it requires attentiveness, alertness, appropriation. In the Hebrew scriptures the point is particularly clear, for the verb 'to hear' *šm'*, often means to obey. From a biblical perspective, then, to hear is to *heed*—that is, to be shaped by a word of wisdom, of command, of judgment or of promise.⁶ In his understanding of faith as a kind of hearing-heeding, Paul is at one with this biblical emphasis. Faith, for him, is the fitting human response to a prior divine word, the gospel which means blessing to all the nations. This way of thinking about faith is captured in the apostle's apt expression *akoē pisteōs*, the hearing of faith, at Gal. 3.2, 5.⁷

The third component in the parallel pattern of Abraham's and the Christian's experience is the divine blessing that follows upon the human response of faith. 'Abraham believed God, *and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*'. God blessed Abraham by accepting his believing as the fitting ground of right relationship between them. Likewise, Christians are blessed by God in response to their faith. Furthermore, it was because He knew that He would justify the *ethnē* on the basis of *faith* that God allowed Abraham to hear the gospel in these words: 'In you shall all the *ethnē* be blessed' (Gal. 3.8).

In light of the parallels between Abraham's experience and the Galatians' which Paul appears to be stressing in Gal. 3.5-6, it seems likely that the *kathōs* which introduces v. 6 is intended to indicate similarity. We might best capture this intention with an English phrase like 'so too', 'just so', or 'in the same way'. Thus Paul's argument moves from the Galatians' experience to Abraham's in this way: 'Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works wonders among you do so on the basis of works of the Law or the hearing of faith?'. (The unavoidable, but unexpressed, response anticipated from the Galatians would be: 'He does so, of course, *ex akoēs pisteōs*'.) 'So, too, Abraham *episteusen* . . .'

Given the connection between 3.5 and 3.6, especially the stress on faith/believing, the *kathōs* that introduces v. 6 would be particularly forceful, it might seem, if Paul could say: 'Just so, Abraham believed

God, and on the basis of his believing, God bestowed upon him the Spirit'. This, of course, Paul does not say. This he *cannot* say because Scripture does not affirm that Abraham received the Spirit. Scripture does declare that Abraham believed God and that his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. It is, therefore, *pistis/pisteuein* which affords the connection between the experience of Abraham and the experience of the Galatians, but in drawing upon Abraham as the prototype and father of all who live *ek pisteōs*, Paul is forced by Scripture itself to shift from the category of *pneuma* to that of *dikaiosynē*.

How much of a shift is this? That is, does Paul think of being justified (reckoned righteous) and receiving the Spirit as two separate, unconnected happenings, or are these two inevitably connected and, indeed, coincidental? The fact that Paul can appeal to Abraham's experience of being reckoned righteous by faith as an analogy and prototype of the Galatians' experience of having God bestow the Spirit on the basis of faith already suggests the latter. It is because Abraham and the Christian parallel and mirror each other in their faith and its consequences that, on the basis of the principle 'Like father, like son', Paul can say, in 3.7, 'You can be sure, then, that those who live out of *faith*—*they* are Abraham's sons'.

The close connection between receiving the Spirit and being reckoned righteous is indicated also by Gal. 3.8, where a key phrase is *en soi*. What does Paul take the Scripture to mean when it proclaimed the gospel beforehand that 'in you' all the nations would be blessed? A partial answer is provided by the whole of vv. 8 and 9: 'The Scripture, foreseeing that by faith God would justify the Gentiles, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham: "All the nations shall be blessed *in you*". So (for this reason) those who live on the basis of faith are being blessed *with* believing Abraham'. There is, in Paul's mind, an obvious point of contact between 'in you' and 'with Abraham'. To be blessed 'in' Abraham is to be blessed *as* he was, namely by being reckoned righteous.

The parallel expression 'in Christ Jesus' (3.26, 28) raises a further possibility about Paul's understanding of 'in you' at Gal. 3.8. The meaning of 'in Christ' has, of course, been much debated and long discussed. In light of *eis Christon ebaptisthēte* and *Christon enedysasthe* at Gal. 3.27, however, it seems likely that the underlying concept is that of incorporation into a sphere of life, or, to borrow a more contemporary image, a 'field of force'.⁸ That Paul can speak of being

incorporated into Christ reminds a reader familiar with Scripture that in the Hebraic sphere the fathers of Israel not only represent but also include their descendants.⁹ In Paul's thinking, though, one is not 'included in' Abraham naturally. It is only by being 'in Christ', the single *sperma* to whom the promise was made (3.16), that believers become the *sperma* of Abraham. One is only 'in' Abraham if that person is 'in Christ'.¹⁰

From this perspective, I suggest that the English expression that best conveys Paul's understanding of *en soi* is 'as your children'—with the proviso, of course, that what makes one a child of Abraham is not biological descent or Torah observance but faith.

In Gal. 3.8a it is clear that 'to be blessed' is a reference to being justified on the basis of faith; but where in this verse do we find, as I earlier suggested we could, an allusion to the Spirit? If my interpretation of *en soi* ('as your children') is valid, such an allusion occurs in that phrase, for in Paul's view believers, like Isaac, are those who are begotten 'according to the Spirit' (Gal. 4.29; cf. 4.6). Thus Scripture proclaimed that all the Gentiles, begotten as children of Abraham by the *Spirit* of God, would be blessed by being reckoned *righteous*.

The connection between justification and the Spirit is also detectable in Gal. 3.21. There Paul writes: 'If a law was given which was able to make alive, righteousness would indeed be on the basis of the Law'. But, of course, no law can ever 'make alive', for no law can empower its hearers to do what it demands. Israel's Law is certainly not the enemy of God's purpose. It is not against the promises of God (3.21a). It is merely ineffectual. Ordered through angels and transmitted by the hand of a mediator (3.10), the Law lacks divine power, that power which is the primary characteristic of Spirit. Those persons who live 'in the Law' (Gal. 3.11) do indeed take God's will seriously; they further assume that they have the power to do it, for they believe that the Law liberates from the flesh's dominion. By contrast, those persons who by faith live 'in Christ' are the children of God by virtue of the Spirit's creative, transforming work. For only the Spirit can empower a person to do God's will; only the Spirit can 'make alive'.¹¹

'Make alive' in Gal. 3.21, then, alludes to the work of the Spirit. Furthermore, we can say that in view of the *alla* clause that follows (3.22), 'make alive' means, above all, to release from the enslaving power of sin. Thus the new mode of life characteristic of the believer

is the fruit of the Spirit in the most realistic sense: just as it is the Spirit which cries out 'Abba, Father' in and through the believer (4.6), so it is the Spirit that brings forth love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. 5.22-23).

At Gal. 3.21, then, Paul argues that righteousness is not by the Law *because* the Law cannot make alive. It is instructive to observe an implication of this assertion, namely, that righteousness *is* by means of (*ek*) that which *can* make alive, namely the Spirit. Here Paul appears to be linking the status of righteousness with the work of the Spirit in the closest possible way. Indeed, he seems to be saying that God justifies—he makes his human creatures acceptable before him—by overcoming the enslaving and estranging power of sin, and *that* victory is the work of the Spirit. Thus the new *relationship* with God, the status of being justified, is the work of a life-transforming *power*, the power of the Spirit.¹²

In the foregoing paragraphs I have argued that at several points in the argument of Galatians 3 Paul so parallels or intertwines the categories of being justified and receiving the Spirit that we can draw this conclusion: the experience of the Spirit and the status of justification are, for the apostle, inconceivable apart from each other. Each implies the other. Those persons upon whom God bestows the Spirit are justified; the persons whom God reckons righteous have the Spirit poured out upon them.¹³

Although being justified and experiencing the Spirit's power imply each other, they are nevertheless conceptually distinct. *Dikaïousthai* (to be set right with God) points to a status, a relationship, which is, we might say, closed to public viewing—which only God can 'see'. From the human side this status is unobservable as well as unverifiable. It is therefore not accidental that in Galatians when Paul presses the argument that justification is based upon faith rather than works of the Law, he does not appeal to the Galatians' memory of their experience. He appeals rather to the authority of Scripture and Scripture's archetypal instance of faith reckoned as righteousness. Scripture's pronouncements about justification have evidential value which the status of justification itself, because it is not observable, cannot. Thus Paul does not rhetorically *ask* the Galatians whether God justified them on the basis of faith or works of the Law. Rather, he *declares*, quoting Scripture, that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness and that those who live on the basis of faith, as Abraham did, are Abraham's sons.

The situation is quite different with respect to the bestowal of the Spirit. In this case Paul's final authority is not Scripture but rather the Galatians' own experience. The evidential value of that experience is obvious because the working of the Spirit has observable effects. At 3.5 Paul closely connects God's 'supplying the Spirit' with his 'working wonders' among the Galatians. *Dynameis* provide observable, tangible evidence of the Spirit's operation. The Abba-cry is another undeniable manifestation of the Spirit (Gal. 4.6), and the fruits of the Spirit are plain for all to see (Gal. 5.22-26). I suggest further that when, at Gal. 2.7 and 2.9, Paul speaks of the pillar apostles *seeing* (*idontes*) that he had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised and *becoming aware* (*gnontes*) of the grace that was given to him, he is again referring to the observable signs of the Spirit's presence among his converts.¹⁴

An important theological debate of an earlier generation centered upon the question of whether, according to Paul, God's justification of the sinner meant that righteousness was 'imputed' or 'real'. Were sinners transformed by the infusion of divine grace and power, or did God now *regard* sinners as though they were righteous? A close reading of Galatians, I think, obviates the question. For Paul, a new status before God implies a life transformed by the working of God's Spirit and vice versa. It would not occur to him that a Christian would claim the status if the signs of the Spirit were lacking. Justification and the Spirit: in Paul's mind one necessarily implies the other, and to claim the one without evidencing the other would be to misapprehend the nature of Christian life.¹⁵

NOTES

1. Cf. H.A.W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians* (2nd edn; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880), pp. 157-58; E.D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), p. 176; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK; 10th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), p. 96, who cites Lietzmann; A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (ThHK; 3rd edn; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), p. 109. A parallel instance of two parallel *hina* clauses depending upon the main clause is to be seen at Gal. 4.5.

2. Compare *elpis dikaiosynēs* at Gal. 5.5: hoped-for righteousness.

3. Meyer (*Handbook*, pp. 145, 156): justification; Burton (*Commentary*, p. 175): justification by faith; G.S. Duncan (*The Epistle of Paul to the*

Galatians [New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1934], p. 103): 'the only vital way in which God can fulfil His promise and give them blessing is by giving to them His Spirit'; V.P. Furnish ('The Letter of Paul to the Galatians', *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* [ed. C.M. Laymon; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971], p. 829): the coming of the Spirit through faith; H.D. Betz (*Galatians* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], p. 153): the gift of the Spirit; F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Galatians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 168): the blessing of Abraham comes in the form of the Spirit.

4. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 140 n. 13. Oepke (*Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, p. 103) similarly translates, 'Wie geschrieben steht . . .'

5. Four other translations are: 'Es ist so: "Abraham glaubte Gott . . ."' (Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 85); 'Why, it is as with Abraham . . .' (Moffatt); 'Wie [denn auch] Abraham Gott glaubte . . .' (Zürcher Bibel); 'Thus Abraham "believed God . . ."' (RSV).

6. The most obvious instance of this OT emphasis is the *shema*: 'Hear, O Israel' (Deut. 6.4). Here, as frequently in the prophets (e.g. Amos 3.1-2; 4.1; 5.1-2; 8.4-8; Hos. 4.1-3; especially revealing is Hos. 5.1), elsewhere in Deuteronomy (e.g. 5.1; 9.1-3; 27.9-10), and in Proverbs (e.g. 1.8; 4.1, 4.10; 5.7; 8.32-33), the verb *hear* obviously means more than 'listen'; it means to acknowledge and respond appropriately to a command of God or a word of judgment or wisdom.

7. I am fully aware that a growing number of scholars, including H.D. Betz in his *Galatians* commentary, think that *akoē pisteōs* means the message, the proclamation, of faith. In my view these scholars have failed to hear the intended nuance of Paul's felicitous phrase. As I hope to show elsewhere, the NT texts which they usually appeal to (Jn 12.38; Rom. 10.16-17; 1 Thess. 2.13; Heb. 4.2) do not, in fact, support their claim that at Gal. 3.2, 5 *akoē pisteōs* should be rendered 'the message of faith'.

8. L.E. Keck, *Paul and his Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 58.

9. Note especially Gen. 25.23. Of Esau and Jacob God says to Rebekah: 'Two nations are in your womb'.

10. Note especially 3.28-29 where being 'in Christ' is equivalent to being 'of Christ', and further, 'if you are of Christ then you are Abraham's *sperma*'.

11. Cf. Rom. 8.11; 1 Cor. 15.45; 2 Cor. 3.6; and Gal. 5.25; 6.8. I can best make sense of Gal. 5.25 by translating: 'If we have been given life by the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit's lead'. Pertinent to my present point is this statement by D.J. Lull: The way of righteousness based on works of the law 'is a way which is based on the assumption that a person already has the power to be free from the flesh's dominion and to live in accordance with God's "will" (5.16-18). This is what Paul calls a way of living that is based on confidence in the flesh (3.3; 6.12-13)' ('The Spirit and the Creative Transformation of Human Existence', *JAAAR* 47 [1979], p. 42).

12. I do not intend to suggest that Paul thinks of the gift of the Spirit and the new status of being justified in terms of a temporal sequence. Gal. 4.6 and 4.29, taken together, caution against thinking of a cause-effect sequence; for whereas 4.6 implies that sonship *precedes* the gift of the Spirit, at 4.29 the Spirit is responsible for one being begotten as a child of promise. It is better to consider receiving the Spirit and being justified as coincidental.

13. After completing a draft of this article, I came upon a statement of Nils A. Dahl which coincides with the view of justification and the Spirit which I had worked out. In 'Promise and Fulfillment' (*Studies in Paul* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], pp. 121-36, at 133) Dahl writes:

the Galatians' reception of the Spirit, and their experience of its work among them, proves that God has justified them, given them a share in the blessing of Abraham and made them his sons and heirs. Justification and the gift of the Spirit are inseparable from one another. Paul makes no distinction between the forensic and the pneumatic. The gift of the Spirit is evidentiary proof of God's acceptance.

The only part of this statement that I would disagree with is the assertion that Paul makes no distinction between the forensic and the pneumatic. Both categories do inevitably imply each other, but he can and frequently does make a distinction.

14. If this is a defensible view, a striking parallel to Gal. 2.7, 9 can be found in Luke's account of Peter's experience with Cornelius in Acts 11 (see especially vv. 17-18). At 1 Cor. 2.4-5 Paul himself declares that his *logos* and his *kērygma* rested upon the proof of possessing the Spirit and power, in order that the Corinthians' faith might be faith in the power of God rather than the wisdom of men. On the observable signs of the Spirit's work, see J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), pp. 205-58.

15. I believe that a careful reading of passages in other Pauline letters supports the contention that, for the apostle, justification and the Spirit are inseparable and coincidental. The most important texts are Rom. 8.1-11, especially vv. 4 and 10 (compare the Spirit/peace in 8.6 with be justified/peace at Rom. 5.1); Romans 4 and 8.14-17; 1 Cor. 6.11; 2 Cor. 3.8-9.



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