

**Gal. 3, Law vs. Faith as the Means of Salvation**  
**October 1, 1988**  
**H. Van Dyke Parunak**

**A. Structural Overview**

1. 3:1-5, Chapter Overview  
A series of six questions in three pairs, raising two contrasts: Law and Works vs. Promise and Faith as the means of *salvation*; Flesh vs. Spirit as the means of *Christian Life*. Law and Flesh are associated; so are Faith and Spirit. These themes are then developed in the next two sections.
2. 3:6-4:7, Law vs. Faith (concentration of these words).  
The words are not quite comparables. Law and Promise are two things that God presents; Works and Faith are the appropriate responses. The argument is developed using a pattern familiar from 1 Cor. 9, 11a, and 14: Scripture and logic side by side, also combining the synchronic/diachronic contrast evident in Rom. 6-7.
  - a) 3:6-14, Argument from Scripture, synchronic.
  - b) 3:15-4:7, Argument from Logic, diachronic.
3. 4:12-5:1, Flesh vs. Spirit  
These are the domains in which law and faith work, respectively.

**B. 3:1-5, Chapter Overview**

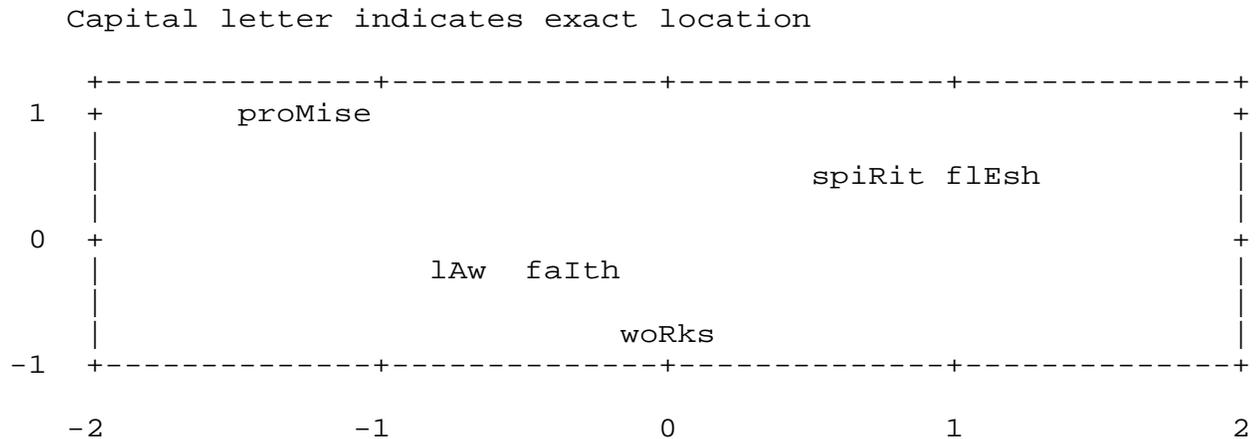
Approach it from three perspectives: structural, chronological, and thematic

1. Structure:  
There are six questions, alternating between questions about their intelligence and motivation, and questions about the content of their faith and walk. The three substantive questions pose two contrasts: works/faith and flesh/Spirit. These are arranged chiastically, with works/faith on the outside, and taken up in the first section following. The basic argument is, "After all you have seen first-hand, how can you be so foolish as to be drawn away with this error?"
2. Chronology:  
From the details in these questions, we can reconstruct their spiritual biography.
  - a) v.1, Christ was placarded before them as crucified.
    - 1) The essence of Paul's ministry, 1 Cor. 2:2. "Bring them to the foot of the cross and hold them there until the blood drips on them."
    - 2) Recall 2:21. What need for Christ to die, if salvation is by the law?
  - b) v.2, They received the Spirit by faith, apart from the law. The emphasis in all three substantive questions is that the law is new to their experience. Under Paul's tutelage, they

never heard of it, and yet experienced a full salvation. Why bring it in now, after the fact?

- c) As a result, v.3, they "began in the Spirit." NB: Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13, no salvation without the Spirit. He is the agent and means of our salvation, not a later addition.
  - d) v.4, They suffered persecution for their faith. 2 Tim. 3:12.
  - e) v.5, They have experienced miracles in the power of the HS, by faith and not by law.
  - f) After all this,
    - 1) v.1, they are disobeying the truth.
    - 2) v.3, they are seeking perfection through the flesh.
3. Three pairs of themes emerge from this. Each has a "good" and a "bad" side.
- a) Law vs. Promise, two modes of divine communication with man.
  - b) Works vs. Faith, the responses appropriate to each of them.
  - c) Flesh vs. Spirit, the source of the strength for the appropriate response.

Notice that these are associated in a skewed fashion, though. Define a cooccurrence proximity between two words as  $(\# \text{ verses where both appear})^2 / (\# \text{ verses where one appears}) * (\# \text{ verses where other appears})$ , then run MDS on the resulting matrix. Here is the result:



Thus, by collocation, there are three main clusters: "promise" by itself, one contrasting "flesh" with "spirit," and one contrasting "faith" with both "law" and "works."

NB: could use a more refined cooccurrence definition, based on # of words separation.

**C. 3:6-14, Law vs. Faith: Synchronic Argument**

Structured chiastically (see UM notes); 3:5 serves double duty as last of the three questions and outer member of the chiasm with

3:14b. In fact, 3:2 asks the same question, Thus the question opens the chiasm, and we find the answer at the end. Note shift from "he/they" to "we/you" at v.13, start of second panel.

1. Structure of the section: alternation of thesis with supporting verse. The support comes second in every case but the first (3:6-7), where "therefore" in v.7 shows the connection (reads better if we change period at end of 6 to comma), and the last, where the verse is embedded in the middle of the statement, only the first part of which it supports. Pieces:
  - a) 3:6-7. Gen. 15:6 -> The faithful are Abraham's sons.
  - b) 3:8-9. Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 24:18 -> The faithful (of whatever nation) receive Abraham's blessings.
  - c) 3:10. Deut. 27:26 -> The law brings a curse.
  - d) 3:11. Hab. 2:4 -> The law cannot bring justification.
  - e) 3:12. Lev. 18:5 -> The law is distinct from faith.
  - f) 3:13-14. Deut. 21:23 -> Christ has taken our curse for us, in order to give the Gentiles Abraham's blessing and convey the promised Spirit.
2. Chiastic organization:
  - a) 6-9 relate the blessings of Abraham, promised even to the Gentiles.
  - b) 10-12 displays the curse of the law, even for the Jews..
  - c) 13-14 shows that Christ has taken our curse, to allow us to receive the blessing.
  - d) The reference to the Spirit in 14b is another level to the chiasm, taking us back to 3:2,5. "Promise of Spirit" is objective genitive, not subjective: Acts 1:4,5; 2:33.
3. Reception of the Spirit, 3:2,5,14b.
  - a) An important question: What links Abraham with the Spirit? If Paul is trying to prove that the Spirit comes by faith, Abraham seems a poor datum to introduce.
  - b) 3:2,5 suggest that it was obvious to them that they had received the Spirit. No need to prove it to them. Nor did they need to be persuaded that it was faith that brought them this Spirit. They had not been following the law. This is a new addition. No one would have thought it responsible for the Spirit. NB: There is an element of experience in Christianity. If there is nothing in your life that you cannot explain apart from the work of the Spirit of God, you may not be saved! The Spirit is not just a theological concept. He is a living person who changes our lives.
  - c) The argument, then, is not that because of God's promise to Abraham, they have received the Spirit. Rather, it is that the same faith that delivered to them the life-giving Spirit is sufficient to provide for them all of the blessings of Abraham; while the law, to which they find themselves strangely attracted, has power only to curse.

4. The Blessing of Faith, 3:6-9.

The section consists of two couplets, proving very similar points: first, that the faithful are the **sons** of Abraham; second, that they share the **blessings** of Abraham.

a) 3:6-7, The faithful are sons of Abraham.

- 1) OT evidence, Gen. 15:6: Abraham was characterized by faith.
- 2) (Missing detail:) Hebrew uses "son of" to indicate association as well as geneological descent.
  - a> "Son of 50 years": 50 years old.
  - b> "Son of oil" (Zech. 4:14): anointed one.
  - c> "Son of the quiver" (Lam. 3:13) or "...of the bow" (Job 41:20): arrow.
- 3) Conclusion: If you are characterized by faith, as was Abraham, you are associated with him, and can claim to be his "son"--even more than those who, though genetically descended from Abraham, yet are so unlike him in how they seek to please God.

Some might think this tricky, so Paul follows with a more direct argument:

b) 3:8-9, The faithful receive the blessings of Abraham.

- 1) Figure of speech. Scripture doesn't "foresee," and certainly didn't "preach" to Abraham. But here it records the word of God, so is said to do what God actually did in uttering those words.
- 2) "Preached before the gospel": announced good news before it happened. The statement here does not contain the facts of Christ's death and resurrection, what Paul calls "the gospel" in 1 Cor. 15, nor does the noun "gospel" appear here at all. There is just a single verb, meaning "announce good news before it happens," "intimate."
- 3) The evidence is from several passages in Genesis: 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14. God's dealings with the Gentiles are not an afterthought, to patch up a plan that the Jews spoiled by their sin. We were in his mind from the very first!
- 4) In this case, the conclusion is little more than restatement of the evidence. God did promise to bless the Gentiles through Abraham, and certainly, among all Gentiles, those who share Abraham's faith can count on receiving that blessing.

5. The Curse of the Law, 3:10-12.

As he has showed that blessing in general, not just the Spirit, comes through faith, now he shows that what they were turning to for blessing, the law, is in fact a source only of cursing. Three

couplets support this: The law brings a curse; it does not bring justification; it is incompatible with faith as a means of salvation.

a) 3:10, The law brings a curse.

The curse of Deut. 27:26 is on those who do not fulfill **every** commandment of the law. James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If the officer stops you for speeding, it is no defense for you to protest that you didn't rob the bank yesterday. If we fail once, we are guilty, but if we succeed once, we are not righteous. Even if we repent, we still have failed, and can never satisfy the law. Thus the law is a good way to generate curses, but a bad way to seek for righteousness. The next verse shows a better way.

b) 3:11, The law does not bring justification.

Hab. 2:4 shows that God has another plan to provide that, faith. Those who are just, live by the principle of faith. Thus those who do not live by faith, are not just.

c) 3:12, The law and faith are incompatible.

Someone might protest that Hab. is not discussing the law at all. So Paul quotes Lev. 18:5 to show that the law also claims to be a rule of life, and thus is in competition with Hab. 2:4.

1) *Problem*: Lev. 18:5 is part of the revelation of God. If it describes eternal life, then God's way of salvation has changed.

2) But Lev. 18:2,5 presumes that the people already are God's people. This is not outlining a way of salvation, but a standard for life. Gal. 3:21 further makes it clear that *in principle*, salvation cannot come by law.

3) It is the judaizers, not Paul, who may have seen in this verse a means of salvation. Paul is merely pointing out that *if you take it this way*, it contradicts Hab. 2:4. The solution that he takes is to recognize that it cannot offer life.

6. The Solution in Christ, 3:13-14.

This sentence has three parts, each corresponding chiastically to something that has gone before: a couplet showing how Christ has removed the curse, and two purpose clauses, one touching on the blessing of Abraham and one on the promise of the spirit.

a) Christ has redeemed us.

1) Words for "redeem":

a> lutrow: derivative from lutron "ransom," thus emphasis on the price paid. Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18.

b> agorazw: buy. Emphasizes that God now possesses us. This

is the word used in 2 Pet. 2:1; God has a purchaser's right to the unsaved, though it does not benefit them. Same emphasis in 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23.

c> exagorazw: buy from the market. Emphasis on our removal from our previous condition. This is the word here.

2) His means: "being made a curse for us." He has taken our place, suffered the curse we deserved.

3) Basis: Deut. 21:23.

b) 3:14a, This secures to the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham.

c) 3:14b, This also secures the promise of the Spirit to all believers ("we").

#### 7. Conclusion to 3:6-14.

a) As believers, we know that we have the Spirit, and we know that we have it by faith, without merit of our own. But sometimes we are tempted to think that we need to fall back on our own works to earn God's favor.

b) Need to remember that faith brings us, not only the Spirit, but all of the blessings of Abraham, and that the law, by contrast, can only bring a curse.

c) Our faith is not meritorious in itself, but conveys to us the benefits that Christ has won for us in his passion.