

# THE SPIRIT AS THE BLESSING OF THE GOSPEL PROMISED TO ABRAHAM

BY DAVID YOON

The Epistle to the Galatians has long been considered the banner text of the Reformation and the premier exposition of the truth that we are justified by faith alone. Much used of God, heralds of this basic truth have since led countless believers out of the darkness and slavery of a salvation by works into the liberating realm of justification by faith. God's enlightening concerning such a fundamental truth of Christian salvation calls forth thankfulness, but the subsequent obscuring of the central thought of Paul's gospel in Galatians by a preoccupation with justification by faith is a source for lament. Although untold numbers of believers have been objectively justified by faith, how many have been experientially delivered from slavery under the law to freedom in Christ—from the curse of the law to the blessing of Abraham? Ironically, most Christians today anachronistically live to the law in the age of grace, conducting themselves more as the heavy-laden disciples of Moses than as the blessed sons of God. They live mainly by the principle of the law—trying in their flesh to fulfill God's righteous demands—rather than by the principle of grace, which is to continually receive the bountiful supply of the Spirit as the reality of the resurrected Christ. Even though they may not adhere to the ritualistic ordinances or ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law, they are unknowingly enslaved by laws imposed by their ethical principles, religious traditions, cultural practices, and even scriptural knowledge. Instead of abiding in Christ and enjoying His riches, allowing Him to be revealed in them, live in them, and be formed in them, most believers, though forever joined to Christ, have been brought to nought, separated from Him in experience.

One of the principal causes of this mournful situation is that most Christians are taught a narrow and superficial understanding of Paul's gospel in Galatians. Many expositors of the Reformed persuasion understand the theme of Galatians to be justification by faith. Regrettably, few realize that the intrinsic focus of Paul's gospel in Galatians is not a mere doctrine concerning the believers' justification by faith; instead, it is a wonderful, precious, and excellent person: the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and indwelling Christ, who, as the life-giving Spirit, is the replacement of the law. Handley C. G. Moule insightfully points out in his commentary on Galatians, *The Cross and the Spirit*, that numerous topics in Galatians, including justification by faith, are but "accessories around the main theme, the double theme which twines itself always into one—Christ and the Spirit" (16). In Moule's view, although justification is a prominent theme in Galatians, this Epistle is not "a *merely* 'forensic' tractate"; instead, like Romans, Galatians "has all along, or at least all underneath, another supreme theme, which is in a sense its ultimate theme": the "doctrine of the Eternal Spirit" (44-45). Although justification by faith is a necessary procedure to usher the believers into God's salvation, the goal of this salvation is to bring them into participation in the resurrected Christ as the Spirit of life. The primacy of the believers' participation in the Spirit over justification by faith in Galatians is reflected in the fact that the words *justify* and *justified* are mentioned eight times (2:16-17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4), whereas the title *the Spirit*, in reference to the Holy Spirit, is spoken of sixteen times (3:2-3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5, 16-18,

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22, 25; 6:8). In accordance with Paul's emphasis on the Spirit in Galatians, the central aim of Paul's presentation of the truth concerning the believers' justification by faith through grace is not merely, on the negative side, to deliver the believers from the bondage of the law and the works of the flesh; more intrinsically, it is, on the positive side, to usher them into the experience of Christ, the embodiment of God's grace, as the indwelling Spirit.

Paul's gospel does not leave the believers with just a past salvation and a distant hope of future blessing. Rather, he ministered the Spirit to them so that in their experiential union with Christ they would grow to become mature sons of God—the new creation of God, the corporate new man, for the expression and representation of God as the present fulfillment of His purpose in salvation. Whereas the Spirit does not figure prominently in Paul's presentation of the truth of justification by faith, He is presented as everything to the believers in their receiving and maturing in the divine life to be built up as the household of the faith and the Israel of God. Hence, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the Spirit in this Epistle.

Galatians 3:13-14 profoundly and comprehensively reveals the crucial significance of the Spirit in God's economy of salvation:

Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf; because it is written, 'Cursed is everyone hanging on a tree'; in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Veiled by a decidedly narrow, forensic, and judicial hermeneutic of Reformation theology, a number of expositors view the blessing of Abraham mainly as justification by faith. Even when they speak of the blessing of Abraham in relation to the Spirit, the Spirit is understood merely as the evidence and means of the believers' justification. For example, in *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, R. C. H. Lenski states that the "chief content" of the blessing of Abraham is "justification by faith in Christ, our Substitute under the curse" (154). Similarly, in *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, and Justification in Galatians*, Chee-Chiew Lee argues that "the promise of the Spirit is not the content of the blessing of Abraham in Gal 3:14. Rather, the blessing of Abraham is identified with justification, and the Spirit functions as the evidence of receiving the blessing and the means of perpetuating the blessing" (210). In a similar vein, Robert Govett in *Govett on Galatians* refers to the blessing of Abraham as "justification with its seal" (77). In Govett's mind, the Abrahamic blessing is primarily justification by faith, and the Spirit with whom the believers are sealed is mainly "the seal of justification," that is, "the proof of the work of Christ being accepted by the Father on high" (77).

A closer inspection of the immediate context of Galatians 3 and the broader context of the entire Epistle and Paul's writings makes clear that the blessing of Abraham refers to the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the Triune God embodied in Christ and processed through His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection in order to be the believers' bountiful supply and rich inheritance for the realization of God's original intention in the creation of man. Galatians reveals various aspects of the believers' participation in the Spirit as the focused blessing of God's New Testament economy, the Spirit who is the realization of the all-inclusive Christ, the fulfillment of the good land in the Old Testament. The Spirit guides us into the reality of the indwelling Christ—the Christ who is revealed in us (Gal. 1:16), living in us (2:20), and formed in us (4:19)—as the beloved Son of God and the unique seed of Abraham, thereby bringing us into the realization of the divine sonship and ushering us into the enjoyment of grace. By receiving and walking by the Spirit continually, we fulfill God's original purpose in the creation of humanity by becoming a new creation, the church as the one new man, which expresses God in His image as the household of the faith and represents God with His dominion as the Israel of God.

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## The Curse, the Law, and Redemption

In an endeavor to extricate the Galatians from slavery to the law, which they had been brought under by the Judaizers, back to the gospel of Christ (1:6-7), Paul reveals that Christ redeemed the believers out of the curse of the law in order to bring to them the Spirit as the blessing of the gospel that God preached to Abraham (3:13-14). In order to demonstrate the gospel's superiority to the law, Paul underscores the precedence of the former in relation to the latter, pointing out that four hundred and thirty years before God gave the law through Moses, God made a promise of blessing to Abraham, the father of faith (v. 17). Paul refers to this promise as "the gospel," quoting God's word to Abraham: "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (v. 8). In so doing, Paul indicates that the gospel that he received through a revelation by Jesus Christ and preached to the Galatians (1:11-12) corresponds to the gospel that God declared to Abraham in Genesis 12. Thus, the gospel in God's New Testament economy is the continuation and fulfillment of the gospel concerning the nations being blessed, as promised by God to Abraham. In Galatians 3:8 Paul refers to this promise as "the gospel," and in verses 16 and 17 he associates "the promises" with "a covenant previously ratified by God," referring to the fact that the promise that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12 was ratified as a covenant in Genesis 15. This implies that the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12 was an indicator of the coming new covenant of grace revealed in the New Testament.

**T**he background against which this promise was given was the curse upon fallen humanity. According to God's original purpose in His creation of man, man was to enjoy God as his blessing. This thought is indicated by God placing the created man before the tree of life, which signifies God in Christ as life, who is the unique blessing and the supreme enjoyment in the universe (Gen. 2:9; John 14:6; 15:1; 6:48, 57; cf. Rev. 22:14). Through the transgression and fall of Adam, however, man lost the blessing of life and came under the curse of death; that is, he lost God, who is life, by coming under the curse of death (Gen. 3:17-24; 2:17; Rom. 5:12-19). After Adam sinned, God brought in the curse, saying "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen. 3:17), and the earth brought forth thorns as a sign of the curse.

The fall not only brought man under the curse but also effected a complete reversal of man's position in relation to God and His purpose. The corporate man whom God created for the expression of His image and the exercise of His dominion on earth (1:26-27) now manifested the devilish nature constituted as sin in his flesh, and he rebelled against God's authority. This transmutation culminated in the tower of Babel, which the fallen race constructed to reach the heavens so that they might make a name for themselves, signaling a collective rebellion against God and an unrestrained exaltation of humanity (11:1-4). Even in this apparently hopeless situation, however, God did not forsake His eternal purpose with man. Rather, God called one man, Abraham, out of the created, fallen, and cursed race of Adam, and made him the father, the head, of a new race, a race according to faith. In calling Abraham, God unveiled the desire of His heart to impart Himself in Christ as a blessing to the entire human race through Abraham and his seed, announcing the gospel by promising that in him and his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3; 22:18). The gospel that God preached to Abraham was not merely to reinstate man to a righteous standing before God by means of justification; it was primarily to bless His chosen people with Himself as life in order to gain a corporate man in His image and with His authority (cf. 1:28).

Before the promise of the blessing was fulfilled through the coming of Christ (Gal. 4:1-4), the law was given to expose man's sinfulness and preserve God's chosen people for Christ so that they might be conducted to Christ. Since the law is the testimony of God, a portrait of God (Psa. 78:5; 119:88), it places many demands and requirements on fallen man, thereby identifying sin as sin (cf. Lev. 19:2). As a consequence, the law not only utterly exposes man in his sinful nature and evil deeds, leading man to "the clear knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20; 5:20; 7:7), but also subdues sinners before God, shutting the mouth of

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every sinner and causing all the world to “fall under the judgment of God” (3:19). Although God gave Abraham a promise of the blessing, his descendants did not know this nor did they know themselves, thinking that they could fulfill God’s righteous requirement apart from God’s grace (Exo. 19:8, 16—20:21). Therefore, God decreed the law through Moses in order to expose the Israelites’ fallen condition and their inability to keep His law. Moreover, the law was used by God as a “guardian,” a “child-conductor,” to watch over God’s chosen people in its custody in order to bring them to Christ when He came so that they could be justified and participate in the blessing promised and covenanted by God (Gal. 3:23-24). The law was used as a sheepfold to keep God’s elect until Christ came as the pasture, the permanent place for them to stay (John 10:1, 16).

**T**he law makes the curse official, declaring that all the descendants of Adam, who are sinners, are under the curse (Gal. 3:10). According to the righteous requirement of the law, the soul who sins must die (Ezek. 18:4, 20), because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). “All have sinned” and thus deserve to “pay the penalty of eternal destruction,” the righteous demand of the law (3:23; 2 Thes. 1:9). But at the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, “born of a woman, born under law” (Gal. 4:4), who fully kept the law, fulfilling all its requirements in the days of His flesh (Matt. 5:17). This qualified Him to meet the ultimate demand of the law upon all human beings through His vicarious death on the cross on our behalf. Thus, Paul declares that Christ redeemed us out of the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). When Christ was nailed to the cross and forsaken by God because of our sins, which He bore up in His body on the tree, He not only took our curse but even *became* a curse on our behalf (1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23). By His redemptive death, Christ, the seed of Abraham, paid the highest price in order to give us the greatest blessing—the promise of the Spirit as the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14).

### The Blessing of Abraham—the Promise of the Spirit

Upon declaring that Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, Paul does not say, “That we might receive justification” but rather, “That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v. 14). This indicates that the blessing of Abraham is the promise of the Spirit, that is, the Spirit promised by God. F. F. Bruce says in *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, “The substance of the ‘promise’ is the gift of the Spirit or...the promised ‘blessing’ is the gift of the Spirit” (168). According to N. A. Dahl, Paul “identifies the blessing of Abraham with the Spirit, given as a down-payment even to Gentile believers” (qtd. in Bruce 168).

In spite of such a clear statement in Galatians 3:14, many, as noted earlier, hold to an understanding of the blessing of Abraham as being an objective matter of justification by faith. The grammatical construction of Galatians 3:14 argues against this notion. The two clauses here juxtaposed—“that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus,” and “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”—bear an unmistakable parallel structure wherein *in Christ Jesus* corresponds to *through faith*; *the Gentiles* corresponds to *we*; and *the blessing of Abraham* corresponds to *the promise of the Spirit*. Gordon D. Fee notes in *God’s Empowering Presence* that the second clause “by its function in parallel to the first clause and by its language seems intended to tie their experience of the Spirit in vv. 1-5 to the ‘blessing of Abraham’ in vv. 6-9” (394). How then can “the promise of the Spirit” be understood as justification by faith? That could only be the case if the genitive of *the Spirit* were the subjective genitive—i.e., the Spirit gave the promise. But this interpretation is incompatible with the context, since in verses 2 and 5 the Spirit is not the Giver but the gift, the supply and not the Supplier. Hence, *of the Spirit* must point to the Spirit rather than justification as the objective genitive for the blessing, meaning that the Spirit is what was promised. Indeed, looking beyond the immediate scope of Galatians 3, there is additional evidence that the Spirit is the promise. In Peter’s gospel in Acts 2, he quoted Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit (vv. 17-18) and cited the evident manifestations of the Spirit among the disciples as proof that Christ had received “the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father” (v. 33; cf. v. 39) and poured

it out upon them. The goal of this gospel was for his audience to repent and be baptized in order to receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” that is, the Holy Spirit as a gift (v. 38). In Ephesians 1:13 Paul speaks of such an experience as being “sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise” (cf. 4:30).

### The Spirit of Life Issuing from Christ’s Redemptive Death

Seeing that the Spirit is the very blessing of Abraham opens up the full significance of Galatians 3:14: the principal goal of Christ’s redemptive death and the very essence of the gospel in God’s New Testament economy are the impartation of the Spirit, the dispensing of the divine life through the life-giving Spirit. In *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Marvin R. Vincent underscores that, according to Galatians 3:13-14, the main issue of the deliverance from the curse of the law is not justification but the impartation of the Spirit, who gives life:

The deliverance from the curse results not only in extending to the Gentiles the blessing promised to Abraham, but in the impartation of the Spirit to both Jews and Gentiles through faith. The εὐλογία *α blessing* is not God’s gift of justification as the opposite of the curse; for in vv. 10, 11, justification is not represented as the opposite of the curse, but as that by which the curse is removed and the blessing realised. The content of the curse is *death*, ver. 13. The opposite of the curse is *life*. The subject of the promise is the life which comes through the Spirit. (119)

Being justified in Christ through His redemptive death is not an end in itself; it is the judicial procedure through which we may receive the life-giving Spirit, thereby obtaining the divine life. In Galatians 3:11 Paul links being justified before God with having the life of God, pointing to the latter as the issue of the former: “The righteous one shall have life and live by faith.” In harmony with this notion, Paul states in Romans 5:18 that justification is “of life”; that is, justification takes life as its goal. Justification provides the unshakable, righteous foundation for God to dispense the Spirit of life into the believers’ human spirit (8:2). Paul declares that “the spirit is life because of righteousness” (v. 10), indicating that based upon righteousness, the believers’ human spirit joined to the life-giving Spirit is the divine life (1 Cor. 6:17). Since justification enables God, without violating His righteousness, to give eternal life to the believers (Rom. 6:23), “they who are of faith are blessed” (Gal. 3:9) because, having been justified out of faith, they may receive the Spirit, who gives life (2:16; 3:2, 5; 2 Cor. 3:6). Through His vicarious death on the cross, Christ redeemed us out of the curse of the law, the curse of death, in order to lead us into the participation in the Spirit as the blessing of Abraham, the blessing of eternal life (cf. Psalms 133:3).

### Joined to Christ to Become Abraham’s Seed to Inherit the Promised Spirit

In order for us to receive the promise to Abraham’s seed, Christ needed not only to redeem us from the curse of the law through His substitutionary death but also to be transfigured from the flesh into the life-giving Spirit in His resurrection. In Galatians 3:16, after stating that the promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed, Paul emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ as the seed of Abraham: “He does not say, And to the seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one: ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ.” Paul proceeds to present the marvelous truth that by being joined with Christ, the believers are the corporate seed of Abraham, heirs of the promised blessing. Verses 26 through 28 unveil that through faith in Christ and baptism into Him, the believers have been incorporated into Christ, have put on Christ as their clothing, and are all one in Christ. We cannot enter into a union in life with the incarnate Christ who is just the flesh; we can be in an organic union only with the pneumatic Christ, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). In His incarnation Christ as God became the seed of Abraham, that is, a man in the flesh (Matt. 1:1; John 1:14); and through His resurrection Christ as a man in the flesh was transfigured into the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). Today the resurrected Christ as the Spirit is the transfigured descendant of Abraham. Since we have been incorporated into such a Christ, Paul boldly proclaims that if we are “of Christ,” we are “Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Because

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of our spiritual union with the resurrected Christ as the transfigured seed of Abraham, we, who are parts of Christ, members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:30), are now individually sons of Abraham and collectively the corporate seed of Abraham—and, as such, heirs of God’s promised blessing: the life-giving Spirit (Gal. 3:7).

### **The Spirit as the Blessing Being the Reality of the Resurrected and Ascended Christ**

The blessing that God promised to Abraham for all the nations and that the believers have received through faith in Christ is nothing less than the Spirit as the reality of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. In Acts 3:25 Peter, in preaching the gospel to the Jews, spoke of the “covenant which God covenanted with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’” The seed of Abraham here refers to Christ, which is confirmed by the very next verse: “To you first, God, having raised up His Servant, has sent Him to bless you” (v. 26). Here the Servant of God whom God has raised up refers to Jesus, whom God glorified by raising Him from the dead in His resurrection and exalting Him to His right hand in His ascension (vv. 13-15; 2:32-33; Eph. 1:19-20). God sent the resurrected and ascended Christ first to the Jews to bless them by pouring out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 17, 32-33). Thus, the Christ whom God raised and sent to the Jews in order to bless them is the Spirit whom God poured out upon them. This indicates that in the economy of God and in the experience of the believers, the resurrected and ascended Christ is equal to the outpoured Spirit. The blessing as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham for all the nations is the Spirit as the realization of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

### **God in Christ as the Spirit— the Unique and Ultimate Blessing of the Gospel**

In contrast to such a wonderful and high understanding of the blessing of Abraham, many Christians are taught a superficial and narrow view of the blessing revealed in the New Testament. While some believers commonly understand the blessing of Abraham to be forgiveness of sins or everlasting existence untouched by death, others interpret it mainly as physical blessing, which includes health and wealth that they secure. Prosperity gospel preachers often speak of the Abrahamic blessing in terms of possessing a large house or a luxury vehicle as signs of God’s favor. Such objective, outward, and material views of blessing fall woefully short of the revelation in the Word that the Triune God Himself is the only true blessing in the entire universe. Although God indeed “affords us all things richly for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6:17) and will supply us with our basic material needs if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:19-34), the Scriptures reveal that the Triune God Himself is the only true and ultimate blessing in the entire universe. This truth is revealed even in the Old Testament. In Numbers 6:23-27 Jehovah instructed Moses to tell Aaron and his sons to bless the children of Israel, saying to them, “Jehovah bless you and keep you; Jehovah make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; Jehovah lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel, that I Myself may bless them.” *Jehovah bless you and keep you* may be ascribed to the Father, for the Father blesses His people and keeps them in His name and from the evil one (Eph. 1:3; John 17:11, 15). *Jehovah make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you* may be ascribed to the Son, for the Son, as the image of the invisible God, is the face of God, the visible presence of the invisible God, shining on God’s people as the great light and the rising sun, thereby becoming all-sufficient grace to us (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Luke 1:78; Matt. 4:16; John 8:12; 1:14-18). *Jehovah lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace* may be ascribed to the Spirit, for the Spirit as the countenance, the expression, of God (cf. Jer. 3:12; Eph. 4:30) transmits peace to us (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 8:6; 14:17). It is remarkable that Numbers 6:23-27, which describes God blessing His people, does not speak of material blessings; instead, it speaks of participating and delighting in the Triune God as light, grace, and peace in intimate fellowship with Him.



## The Spirit as the Blessing of Abraham Typified by the Good Land

The Spirit as the greatest blessing of the New Testament gospel is the realization of Christ typified by the good land. One of the main items that God promised to Abraham was that God would give him and his seed the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:8; 26:3-4). The promised land, a literal territory promised to the children of Israel as the earthly and physical descendants of Abraham (22:17), is only the physical aspect of the blessing of Abraham, whereas Galatians 3:14 clearly identifies the blessing as the promise of the Spirit to be received by the New Testament believers through faith. Thus, the good land in the Old Testament is not the reality or fulfillment of the promised blessing but is rather a full type of Christ as the promised Spirit whom the New Testament believers may enjoy as their portion and inheritance. This thought is corroborated by Colossians 1:12, where Paul reveals that just as the good land was allotted to the children of Israel as their physical inheritance (Josh. 14:1), so also the pneumatic Christ has been given to the believers as their “allotted portion” for their divine inheritance. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul indicates that the history of Israel in the Old Testament is a complete type of the experiences of the believers in the New Testament (vv. 6, 11; cf. Rom. 15:4), who are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Hence, the Israelites’ enjoyment of the riches of the promised land signifies the believers’ participation in the riches of Christ realized as the promised Spirit. The land of Canaan is a “spacious,” “exceedingly good” land, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” and a land that is abundantly rich in water, food, and minerals, where the Israelites lacked nothing and could eat bread without scarcity (Gen. 15:18-21; Exo. 3:8; Num. 14:7; Deut. 8:7-9; Eph. 3:8, 18). This rich and vast land typifies the all-inclusive and all-extensive pneumatic Christ, whose riches are unsearchable and whose dimensions are immeasurable to be the abundant supply to the believers (Num. 14:7; Deut. 8:7-9; Eph. 3:8, 18). Hence, in Colossians 2:6-7 Paul exhorts us to “walk” in Christ to enjoy His riches, just as the children of Israel lived and walked in the good land, enjoying its rich produce. The promised Spirit, the center of the gospel of the New Testament economy, is the reality of the untraceably rich and universally vast Christ, who is typified by the exceedingly rich and spacious land of Canaan, to be our portion for our enjoyment.

### Receiving the Spirit

In Galatians 3:14 Paul not only identifies the blessing of Abraham as the promised Spirit but also indicates that the bestowing of this blessing to the believers in Christ depends on receiving the Spirit by faith. Regrettably, many believers, influenced by a forensic view of God’s salvation, regard receiving the Spirit as a past occurrence or a future event. Understood in a judicial framework, the promise of the Spirit refers either to the past as evidence of justification or to the future as in “the hope of righteousness” in Galatians 5:5. But Paul’s burden in this Epistle, and particularly in chapter 3, is emphatically on the believers’ present experience. In verse 2 he reminds the Galatians of their past experience of receiving the Spirit in order to point out a logical extension to the present in the next verse: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (v. 3). The Galatians unknowingly departed from the Spirit and inevitably lapsed into the flesh in their present experience; instead, they should have remained in the Spirit continuously to be perfected by the Spirit. Paul strengthens this thought in verse 5: “He therefore who bountifully supplies to you the Spirit and does works of power among you, does He do it out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?” Here Paul is very deliberate in his language. The phrase translated “He...who bountifully supplies” in the Greek is an attributive participle: ὁ ἐπιχορηγῶν. The word ἐπιχορηγέω used here by Paul is a compound verb rich in meaning, comprised of the prefix ἐπι and the word χορηγέω (transliterated chorēgeō). The latter is derived from the word for a wealthy patron who takes upon himself the financial responsibility for supplying the various needs of a traveling chorus; hence, it means to supply, to meet the needs of, and to care for. To this already profound word Paul adds the intensifying prefix ἐπι to convey that this supply is not meager but rich, plenteous, and sufficient. And the verb form that he employs is the present participle, which, unlike the aorist or perfect participles, has a durative aspect, implying ongoing action as yet incomplete. Paul’s language strongly emphasizes the present, ceaseless, and bountiful dispensing of the Spirit as the very supply that the believers need in order to grow and be perfected.

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Although we received the Spirit at the time of regeneration and were sealed with the Spirit once for all (Eph. 1:13), we still need to receive the Spirit continually for the duration of our Christian life in order to progress in and be perfected by the Spirit. On the one hand, for God to bountifully supply the Spirit to us continuously is for Him to carry out His most crucial work in the believers, the work of dispensing Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers to be their life, life supply, and everything. On the other hand, to receive the dispensing of the Spirit continuously is the believers' highest privilege, greatest enjoyment, and most essential responsibility. Sadly, countless believers are ignorant of this wonderful divine transmission from God because they are occupied with the role of the Spirit as the proof of their justification in the past or with the work of the Spirit in their glorification in the future. Even though they have begun by the Spirit by being born of the Spirit in their spirit (John 3:6) and will ultimately be transfigured in their body at their glorification through the operation of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:1-5), they need to be transformed by the Spirit in their soul throughout their Christian life by partaking of the Spirit day after day (John 3:6; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:1-4). By participating in the bountiful Spirit continuously, they fulfill the desire of God's heart by having Christ live in them and be formed in them so that they may be mature sons of God and heirs of God (Phil. 1:19).

### The Spirit as the Realization of Christ, the Replacement of the Law

In Galatians Paul reveals that the Spirit as the blessing of the glad tidings is the realization of Christ as the replacement of the law in the believers' experience. In particular, the believers' progressive experience of the indwelling Christ unveiled in Galatians—Christ revealed, living, and formed in them—hinges on the Spirit. Galatians 1 unveils that it pleases God to reveal His Son in us in order to rescue us out of the present evil age, that is, the Jewish religion as the religious course of the world (vv. 4, 15-16). Galatians 2 unveils that Christ who lives in us as our life replaces the law with its ordinances so that in our experience we might be dead to law and live to God (vv. 11-13, 19-21). Galatians 4 shows that while the flesh working together with the law produces children according to the flesh, the Spirit working through grace produces children according to the Spirit (vv. 21-31), who are sons of God and heirs through God (vv. 4-7). In order to be sons of God and heirs of God's riches in reality, we need Christ to not only be revealed in us and live in us but to also be formed in us (v. 19). For Christ to be formed in us is for Christ who was born into us to be fully grown in us so that we may be saturated with Christ to become the same as Christ in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. Moreover, for Christ to be *formed* in us unto maturity, we need to be *transformed* into His image through the work of the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18) and be *conformed* to the image of the firstborn Son of God through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in us (Rom. 8:2, 29).

### Christ as Grace Experienced through the Believers' Mingled Spirit

The Spirit as the glad tidings of God's New Testament economy brings the believers into the enjoyment of Christ as grace. Paul's deep burden in writing Galatians was to transfer the believers from the covenant of law symbolized by Hagar, which brings God's chosen people into the slavery of the law, to the covenant of grace symbolized by Sarah, which brings forth children unto freedom who inherit the promised blessing (Gal. 4:21-31). In Paul's view, grace is not merely unmerited favor that God bestows upon sinners for their justification or forgiveness of sins; more intrinsically, grace is Christ Himself, the embodiment of God, imparted into the believers as the life-giving Spirit to be their portion. In Galatians 5:4 Paul speaks of being "brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Here being "brought to nought, separated from Christ" is equal to having "fallen from grace," implying that grace refers to Christ Himself. For a believer in Christ to fall from grace is not, as commonly understood, to lose one's salvation and suffer eternal perdition; instead, it is to be severed from Christ as grace in our experience by failing to abide in Him and thus being "reduced to nothing, separated from Christ; deprived of all profit from Christ..., making Him of no effect" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 4, note 1). Paul's close identification of grace with Christ is confirmed in Galatians 2:20-21,



where, immediately after speaking about Christ living in him (v. 20), he says, “I do not nullify the grace of God” (v. 21). Here Paul affirms that not allowing Christ to live in him is tantamount to annulling the grace of God; thus, the grace of God is the indwelling Christ.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul declares, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live...” However, in verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter where Paul speaks of Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit (v. 45b), Paul substitutes *Christ* with *grace*, personifying grace: “I labored...abundantly..., yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.” In Paul’s understanding and experience, the abundant grace of God laboring in and for him was nothing less than the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit living in and for him. The grace with which Paul labored was Christ as the Spirit who lived in Paul. Because grace is Christ as the Spirit, the Spirit is called the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). Since Christ as the Spirit of grace is joined to the believers’ spirit, producing a mingled spirit—the believers’ human spirit regenerated and indwelt by Christ as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17)—their subjective enjoyment of grace is predicated upon the exercise of their mingled spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). In Galatians 6:18 Paul underscores this thought by pointing to their mingled spirit as the location of grace: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Sadly, although many Christians fondly sing of “amazing grace” and desire to appropriate the power of this grace, in practice they nullify grace when they live in the principle of law, the principle of trying to meet God’s requirements by the effort of the flesh, and are thereby deprived of the riches of Christ as grace in their experience. They are veiled from seeing that grace is the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit in their mingled spirit and that in order for them to appropriate grace, they need to walk by the Spirit in their spirit (5:16, 25). May we receive mercy from the Lord to walk according to our mingled spirit, thereby abiding in Him, letting Him live in us, and enjoying His boundless riches, so that we may continue to stand in and partake of grace in order to enjoy freedom from the bondage of the law and become full-grown sons of God (Rom. 5:2; 8:4).

### The Spirit of God’s Son Guiding the Believers into the Reality of the Sonship

Galatians reveals that the New Testament believers are not slaves to works under law but sons in life under grace. In Galatians 3:26 Paul says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” The expression *faith in Christ Jesus* indicates that faith ushers us into Christ, uniting us with Christ in life. Since Christ is the divine life and the unique Son of God in whom is the sonship (John 14:6; Matt. 16:16), we may be sons of God in life only by being identified with Christ through faith, just as we are sons of Abraham by being joined to Christ as the unique seed of Abraham. In Galatians 4:4-6 Paul goes on to underscore the function of the Spirit to bring us into the realization of the sonship: “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” According to Galatians 3:13-14, Christ redeemed us out of the curse of the law that we might receive the promise of the Spirit; and according to 4:5-6, Christ redeemed those under law that we might receive the sonship, which is made real to us in our experience by the Spirit of God’s Son. This indicates that the ultimate goal of Christ’s redemption is for the believers to receive the promised Spirit, the Spirit of God’s Son, who makes the Son of God real in us by bringing us into spiritual and experiential union with Him. God the Father has sent forth into us the Spirit of His Son, who, as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), is the reality of the Son as life, in order to produce us as His sons who possess the divine life and grow in this life unto maturity.

God’s eternal purpose focuses not just on justifying sinners but on producing sons. Before the foundation of the world, we were predestinated unto sonship, not unto justification, according to the good pleasure of God’s will (Eph. 1:5). In fulfilling this purpose, the Spirit of God’s Son plays a crucial role in begetting and maturing the sons of God. We began our Christian life by the Spirit (Gal. 3:3); at our regeneration we are born of the Spirit

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in our spirit (John 3:6). Paul speaks of the believers as being children “born according to the Spirit” (Gal. 4:28-29). Further, we are brought unto maturity by the operation of the Spirit within us (Heb. 6:1). This notion is implied in a rhetorical question that Paul asks in Galatians 3:3: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” This question points to the believers’ need to be perfected by the Spirit. The Greek word translated “perfected” in verse 3 (ἐπιτελεῖσθε) is the middle voice of the verb meaning “to perfect,” “to bring a process to completion” (with the prefix *epi* again being an intensifier). The adjective form of this word is used in reference to maturity as the completion of growth (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6). Hence, Galatians 3:3 can be rendered, “Are you now being matured by the flesh?” The implication in Galatians 3:3 that the believers need to be matured by the Spirit is inserted between verse 2, which speaks of the believers’ receiving the Spirit, and verse 5, which speaks of God bountifully supplying the Spirit. We can be matured only by the Spirit to be full-grown sons of God. Since the law, lacking the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), is unable to give life (Gal. 3:21), it cannot perfect or mature the believers (Heb. 7:19); the Spirit, however, is well able to produce full-grown sons, because the Spirit gives life, supplying them with the abounding riches of the grace of life (Eph. 1:7-8; 1 Pet. 3:7). By receiving and walking by the Spirit day after day, we will bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is constituted with the wonderful attributes of God, so that we will be mature sons of God conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God to fully express God (Gal. 5:16, 22-23; Rom. 8:29).

Anticipating the culmination of the sonship, Paul speaks of eagerly awaiting by the Spirit the hope of righteousness out of faith (Gal. 5:5). Here eagerly awaiting the hope of righteousness by the Spirit corresponds to eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body, by enjoying the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). The hope of righteousness refers to the coming Christ because Christ dwelling in us as the life-giving Spirit is both our righteousness and our hope of glory, which will be fully realized at His second coming when our body will be transfigured into the body of His glory (Col. 1:27; Phil. 3:21). By the Spirit, we need to await such a “blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). According to Romans 8:23-25, we expect the hope of obtaining the full sonship, the redemption of our body, at Christ’s coming by partaking of the firstfruits of the Spirit, that is, by participating in the Spirit as the firstfruits of the coming harvest, as the foretaste of our full enjoyment of the Triune God. Through the operation of the Spirit of God’s Son, we are born as sons of God, mature in our sonship, and eagerly await the complete sonship at the coming of Christ.

### The Issue of the Believers’ Participation in the Spirit— the New Creation, the Household of Faith, and the Israel of God

After presenting an extensive revelation concerning the believers’ enjoyment of the Spirit as the ultimate blessing of the gospel, Paul unveils in Galatians 6 that the issue of the believers’ participation in the Spirit as the central blessing of the gospel is not the cultivation of individual spirituality but the producing of the new creation, the corporate expression and representation of God (v. 15). Just as it was by partaking of the riches of the good land that the Israelites were able to build up the temple of God to be God’s habitation on earth for His expression and the city of Jerusalem to establish God’s kingdom for His dominion, so also it is by the believers’ participating in the unsearchable riches of the pneumatic Christ as the reality of the good land that enables the church of God (1:13) to be built up as the new creation of God (6:15), which expresses God as the household of the faith and represents God as the Israel of God (vv. 10, 16). Immediately after speaking of “a new creation,” Paul refers to “as many as walk by this rule” (vv. 15-16). The expression *walk by this rule* corresponds to the expression *walk by the Spirit* in 5:25, as indicated by Paul’s use of the same Greek verb (στοιχέω). This shows that in order for us to be the new creation of God in reality, we need to walk by the Spirit, taking the Spirit as the elementary rule and basic principle of our Christian life.

Moreover, the new creation in Galatians 6:15 refers to the one new man in Ephesians 2:15.

According to Galatians 6:14-16, the new creation issues from the work of the cross, which separates the believers from the religious world characterized by Judaism, a prominent component of which is circumcision; in the new creation there is no distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision; and the issue of walking by the rule of the new creation is “peace.” Similarly, according to Ephesians 2:11-16, the one new man issues from the operation of Christ on the cross to abolish in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances so that He might create those of the circumcision and those of the uncircumcision in Himself into a corporate man, thereby making peace and reconciling them in the one Body of Christ. The new creation is a corporate divine sonship composed of the sons of God, who possess the divine life and “are all one in Christ Jesus,” irrespective of race, social rank, and gender (Gal. 3:11, 26-28). Likewise, the corporate one new man, the “one Body,” is composed of all the Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, those who were made alive and raised up together with Christ and thus created into one (Eph. 2:5-6, 14-16; 2 Cor. 5:17).

**T**he church as the new creation has two statuses in Galatians 6: the household of the faith and the Israel of God. The household of the faith (v. 10) is a universal family of faith composed of children of promise (4:28)—that is, all those who are sons of God (3:26) and sons of Abraham through faith in Christ Jesus, and thus heirs of the promised blessing, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (vv. 7, 29). By partaking of the Spirit, the sons of God, the members of the household of the faith, spontaneously express God’s image by manifesting His attributes through the fruit of the Spirit. Before speaking of the household of the faith in 6:10, Paul warns the believers to not sow unto their flesh lest they reap corruption of the flesh and encourages them to sow unto the Spirit in order to reap of the Spirit eternal life (v. 8). Sowing unto the Spirit has an effect on the household of the faith. We must not sow unto the flesh, lest we unintentionally corrupt those of the household of the faith; instead, we must sow unto the Spirit, taking the Spirit as our unique goal, so that we may become a supply of life to the fellow members of the household of faith, thereby producing a harvest of life eternal.

In verse 16 Paul designates those who walk by the rule of the new creation (those who walk by the Spirit as their elementary principle) as “the Israel of God.” This expression is unique in all of Paul’s Epistles. Today in the eyes of God the believers in Christ as the church are the real, spiritual Israel of God, for they are the Israel of God in the Spirit, the ones who are Jews inwardly (Rom. 2:28-29; cf. Phil. 3:3). According to Genesis, Jacob, a heel-holder, a crafty and rapacious supplanter, was transformed into Israel, a prince of God and a victor (32:27-28). Similarly, by walking by the Spirit as the basic principle of our life, we will be transformed from deceitful and greedy persons in our fallen natural life into kings who more than conquer in all our circumstances and even reign in life over all things, executing God’s government on earth and thus representing God with His authority (Rom. 5:17; 8:37; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). This will mark the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in His preaching of the gospel concerning blessing—the promise that He would make of Abraham “a great nation” (Gen. 12:2-3). This great nation refers to the kingdom of God, which includes the church as the kingdom of God in the present age (Matt. 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17), the millennial kingdom in the coming age (Rev. 11:15; 20:4, 6), and the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem in eternity (22:3, 5).

The covenant made with Abraham, which is the very covenant of grace continued in the New Testament, brings forth children of promise born of the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:24, 26), which will eventually and consummately be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). This is the God-built city that Abraham eagerly awaited in his sojourn on earth (Heb. 11:10). As we “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Rom. 4:12), the New Jerusalem is before us—the splendid destination that God has prepared for His people (Heb. 11:16). There, the Spirit promised to Abraham, as the river of water of life issuing from the redeeming God on the throne, will for eternity be bountifully supplied to His glorified elect for their enjoyment and satisfaction

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(Rev. 22:1). The blessing of the tree of life, once lost through Adam's fall, will be our eternal portion—we who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (v. 14)—“and there will no longer be a curse” (v. 3). These things will be the inheritance of the sons of Abraham, the sons of God (21:7), who are the constituents of His dwelling place, His tabernacle (v. 3), for His glorious corporate expression and who will reign with Him throughout eternity as His real Israel, His kingdom, for the exercise of His unchallenged dominion (22:5). The New Jerusalem is, therefore, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham—that in him and in his seed all the nations would be blessed—and the consummation of the believers' participation in the blessing of Abraham—the eternal blessing of the dispensing Triune God.

### Conclusion

The Epistle to the Galatians is rightly regarded as a gospel text, but its message far transcends the justification of sinners for their reinstatement into God's favor. The gospel that Paul presents in Galatians corresponds to the gospel that God announced to Abraham concerning blessing all the nations through him and his seed to restore the fallen and cursed human race to the participation in His eternal purpose—the producing of a corporate man bearing His image and exercising His dominion. Galatians reveals that Christ, as the long-awaited seed of Abraham, annulled the effect of the fall, the curse of death, by fulfilling the demand of the law through His redemptive death and that in resurrection He was transfigured from the flesh into the life-giving Spirit to bless all the families of the earth with Himself. Through faith and baptism into such a Christ, believing Gentiles and Jews have been joined in an organic union with this wonderful person to receive the Spirit of life. This Spirit is the transfiguration of Christ, that is, the all-inclusive realization of the processed and consummated Triune God in Christ as the unique blessing of the gospel. By the operation of this indwelling Spirit, Christ is revealed in the believers, lives in them, and is formed in them to constitute them full-grown sons of God expressing their Father and the Israel of God representing Him on earth. The promise that God gave to Abraham was nothing less than the expression of His eternal desire to give Himself as the real blessing to man in order to gain a new creation in His image with His dominion. Ultimately, this new creation born out of the new covenant of grace will be the New Jerusalem, shining with the glory of God and reigning over the nations in the new heaven and new earth—the eternal fulfillment of His blessing man with the gospel. Let us continually receive and walk by the Spirit so that He may guide us into all the blessed reality of the all-inclusive Christ and perfect us to be the glorious heirs of God's bountiful and eternal blessing today, in the coming kingdom, and for eternity. **AF**

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