

The Problem at Galatia
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I. The Dominant Approach: The Problem at Galatia consisted of the Galatians mis-employing the law in a meritorious manner (“legalism”).

II. The Problems of the Dominant Approach:

A. Historical: There is no reliable first-century evidence of any sect of Judaism being meritorious in their soteriology.

B. Literary: The language of “works, faith, justification” only appear from Gal. 2:15-3:14.

C. Linguistic: When the language of “faith” or “works” are employed, they are qualified: “works *of the law*,” “faith *in Christ*.”

D. Lexical: For Paul, νόμος does not mean “God’s moral will” or “general morality,” it means “the covenant made with the Jews at Sinai, as, e.g., Gal. 3:17, “the law, that came 430 years after the promise...” Contextually, this must mean the covenant made at Sinai, which came 430 years after the covenant made with Abraham. νόμος is a synecdoche for the Sinai covenant itself.

III. My Thesis

The Problem at Galatia consisted of Christians believing that, for a Gentile to benefit from the work of the Jewish Messiah (Christ), he had to identify with the Jewish people and their covenant. For Paul, the promise to Abraham had three parts: I will make you a nation, I will give you a land, and I will make you a blessing to all the nations/Gentiles (same word in Hebrew or Greek). The first two parts were fulfilled through the Exodus and the Conquest of the Land. The third part awaited the arrival of Christ and his death and resurrection. Therefore, to continue to identify as Jews suggests that God has not yet blessed the Gentiles *qua* Gentiles; it suggests that the Abrahamic promise has not yet been fulfilled by Christ.

Bibliographically, a fuller argument is made by me in an article by this title in *Interpretation* no. 41 (January, 1987): 32-43.