

“The Galatians Anathemas as Prescription
Against Teaching a False Gospel”
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ABSTRACT

Paul uses anathemas in Gal 1:8, 9 against the Judaizers who seduced, deserted and perverted the gospel. Analyzing Paul’s discourse to the Galatians reveals dual use of ἀνάθεμα ἔστω as a speech act having meaning, force and desired effects. The goal of this paper is to interact with the various interpretations of what these Pauline anathemas mean and defend a more holistic perspective. This will also entail determining the force and desired effect of these anathemas. Thus in essence, Paul’s anathematization is his relegation or handing over to God opponents of the true gospel for His imminent and eschatological retribution. The force of these anathemas is an exhortational instruction to the Galatian churches to regard these opponents as cursed persons. Therefore, his desired effect of these anathemas is for these churches to choose between him and his gospel and the Judaizers and their "gospel." He wants nothing more than for them to realign themselves with him and his gospel, to reject the Judaizers and disassociate themselves from them and their teaching. By doing this, the Galatian churches will avoid God's imminent retribution.

“The Galatians 1:8-9 Anathemas as Prescription Against Teaching a False Gospel”

In a zealous attack on the abandonment of the gospel, Paul utters these words to the Galatians in 1:8-9:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be anathema. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be anathema. With their uses and abuses throughout the history of the church, do these anathemas say anything to the twenty-first century Christians? What is propositional about this revelation? Is there “the transcendence of anathema” as Timothy George has claimed?¹ What is Paul demanding of his readers? What is God demanding of us? Simply put, it is the contention of this paper that these anathemas prescribe discipline for those who seduce others to a false gospel.

Scriptural Discourse as Human and Divine Speech Act

As Evangelicals we approach the Scriptures as God’s authoritative inerrant speech or “divine discourse.”² We must understand what the human and divine authors mean by what they say. Meaning, in the words of Vanhoozer, “is a regulative idea, one that orients and governs interpretive practice” or simply “the literal sense.”³ Utterances carry more than mere meaning. More must be determined than what was said. The acts of speech are “embodied-enacted authorial intention.”⁴ As biblical interpreters of human and divine discourse, in rhetorical terms, we must go beyond determining the meaning—locution--of these important anathema statements themselves to determine their illocution—the force or implications upon their hearers and their perlocution--the author's desired effects.⁵ It will be born out that what Searle states is correct.

¹ Timothy George, “Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the Service of the Church,” *Review & Expositor* 84, No. 4 (Fall 1987): 703-6.

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986), 93-4.

³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 303.

⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?* 252.

⁵ The “ordinary language” philosophy of language spawned by J. L. Austin and John R. Searle describe human utterances this way and Morland is one who applies Austin’s categories to Galatians studies. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered At Harvard University in 1955* (Cambridge: Clarendon, 1975), 121, William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 32-49 and Kjell Arne Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians: Paul Confronts Another Gospel* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press), 16-7.

It is no surprise that the deconstructionist Derrida looked rather unfavorably on Austin’s theory and method of analyzing human utterances as performatives. His key objection is against there being any shared consciousness between author and reader that does not allow for significant residue to escape in the process of communication. Austin granted that communication contains infelicities or failures in the communication or reception of performative utterances. However, just because these infelicities are possible, it does not mean that knowledge of the author’s intent is impossible or even improbable. Derrida himself assumes that he can be understood in communicating that human utterances are fraught with infelicities. One just needs to be honest with the boundaries given the reader in the context of the performative. Some qualifications are not the thousand qualifications, which cause the death of Austin’s method. Derrida unfairly passes knowledge of authorial intent as a philosophical ideal.

"Propositional acts cannot occur alone; that is, one cannot just refer and predicate without making an assertion or asking a question or performing some other illocutionary act."⁶ An emphasis upon the Bible simply as "propositional revelation"—a series of declaratory statements that can be either rationally affirmed or denied—can cause these latter illocutionary or force qualities of God's revelation to be missed by the reader. Therefore, the appropriate response to Scripture's authority is more than assent to its doctrinal propositions, but obedience to its directives and "expressives".⁷ Therefore, the imperative ἀνάθεμα ἔστω as a speech act has meaning, force and desired effects.

In sum, I will interact with the various interpretations of what these Pauline anathemas mean, defend a more holistic view, and then describe their force upon the Galatians and Paul's desired effects. First, however, who are the ones whom Paul is anathematizing in Galatians 1?

The Offenders and Offense: The Seducing Apostates and Their Gospel

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an extended study on the identity of those causing the problems in Galatia. However, some identification is necessary since, according to Paul, they deserve anathematization. In general, he characterizes them as seducers and apostates—those in these Christian congregations who seek to have Gentiles come under the authority of the Mosaic Law and first century Judaism.⁸

These seducers consisted of the "circumcision group" (Gal 2:12)⁹ as well as "other Jews" who intimidated Peter into separating from Gentiles (Gal 2:13). In Galatians 1:7, Paul states, "there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ." Their "disturbing" (ταράσσω) is destructive to the unity of the body (5:12).¹⁰

As seducers, these kinds of people are false Christians. Paul calls them "false brothers" (2:4). George rightly observes that Paul did not hesitate to call the Galatians his "brothers," making this designation all the more striking.¹¹ They have infiltrated the churches to the point

Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, Second Edition, edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 148-90. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?* 211-14 for a summary of the Derrida-Searle debate, which summarizes Derrida's weaknesses in attacking speech act theory. Another way of saying what has been argued above is the deconstructionist commits the black and white fallacy by arguing that communication either contains absolute certainty or utter skepticism.

⁶John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 25.

⁷ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 25.

⁸The most common designation scholars have given for these offenders is "Judaizers" or *Hebraioi*. Cf. Earl E. Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents: Trends in the Research," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 4-5, 298. Nanos has a helpful section on the labels given to what he entitles "the influencers" in Galatia and shows their shortcomings, specifically concerning Judaizers, opponents or rivals, agitators or troublemakers, and teachers. Mark E. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 200), 115-31.

⁹ See Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 234-42 for good summary of interpretational options for οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι.

¹⁰Cf. Acts 17:6 and 21:38.

¹¹Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary, no. 30, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 148.

that Paul sees them as “a little yeast” that has worked its way through the “whole batch of dough” (5:9). They succeeded by “fooling” and “bewitching” their converts (3:1-5).¹² Jewett notes that the Jewish converts to Christianity may have been severely persecuted. Some church leaders may have thought that the circumcision of Gentile converts would alleviate this tension. Thus reverting to a “Jewish” or “full gospel” would be very persuasive.¹³

These seducers are also apostates in that they are deserters. These who are teaching a different gospel are causing others to “so quickly” desert Him, who called them “by the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6). Paul uses the term μετατίθημι (“deserting”), used elsewhere to describe military or political defection as well as changing one’s religion, philosophy or morals.¹⁴ This verb is in the active sense in Jude 4 for turning truth into error. Ungodly false teachers are condemned because they “have crept in unnoticed” and “turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” The defection of these Galatian apostates is not just moral or philosophical but a change of allegiance along the lines of Hebrews 3:12 which warns, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (NASB).

Furthermore, these apostates are perverters. They present a perverted or “different gospel” that Paul describes as “εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον” (Gal 1:6). Paul appears to use ἕτερος and ἄλλος purposefully. This different gospel is not another of the same kind (ἄλλος) as his but another of a different kind (1:6), and thus it truly is “ὁ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο” (Gal 1:7).¹⁵ Therefore, Bruce is correct when he unequivocally states, “Far from being a gospel in any sense, such teaching was plain apostasy from Christ.”¹⁶ Nanos adds that Paul gives this false teaching the label of “gospel” and then takes it away. “His ironic point is that this other message has no standing as good news except to the degree that the addressees foolishly respond to it as though it were.”¹⁷

It is concerning each of these seducing apostates that Paul says, “Let him be anathema” (Gal 1:9). In order to understand Paul’s prescription in these verses, the question as to what he means by anathema needs answering.

¹² Many take the term “bewitch” (βασκαίνω) to be figurative and sarcastic. Morland thinks it is more probable that it implies demonic power at work in their preaching since it is a technical term in the classical Mediterranean world. Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 146. Paul described the demonic influence behind false teaching elsewhere (1 Tim 4:1).

¹³ Robert Jewett, “The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation,” *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-1971): 204-6. Cf. also F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 31-2.

¹⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 75.

¹⁵ Morland notes that regardless of how the original audience viewed the word play, they would certainly understand Paul’s point that there is a correct gospel, and that they should reflect upon the illegitimacy of the Judaizers’ teaching. Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 143.

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 32.

¹⁷ Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 287-88.

The Meaning of the *Anathemas* in Gal 1:8-9

Scholars have offered various definitions of this anathema.¹⁸ One can see this in simply surveying some translations. While the NASB, KJV, RSV, NAB, ESV, and New World Translation all translate it “accursed,” the NIV renders it “eternally condemned,” the TNIV has “let that person be under God’s curse,” and the more dynamic Phillips and TEV have “may he be damned” and “be condemned to hell” respectively. These raise some important questions concerning the meaning of this concept. First, because Paul unites the term to a present imperative locution (meaning), illocution (force) and even perlocution (desired effect) will be hard to discuss separately. Second, does the term indicate present or eschatological consequences or perhaps both? The various views will be assessed for their strengths and weaknesses and will give rise to a better approach.

Anathema as a Magical Curse View

Betz asserts that this anathema had a “magical function” and is an example of the “magical letter” genre. He maintains that when the stated conditions of a curse are met, it takes effect automatically.¹⁹ Because the letter opens with a conditional curse in Galatians 1:8-9 and closes with a corresponding blessing in 6:16 the letter becomes a “magical letter.” Betz compares these anathemas to Paul’s handing over the incestuous man to Satan in 1 Corinthians 5:5.²⁰ There, the offender faces a magical curse much like a hex that would destroy his physical body.

Several factors suggest that the origin of these “curses” is not in magic. First, the supposed pagan magical texts that Betz uses as evidence in relation to Galatians 1:8-9 are not disciplinary.²¹ Second, Betz himself admits, “no satisfactory investigation of the genre exists.”²² Without such an investigation it is doubtful whether such a genre even exists. Third, many see

¹⁸Cf. Acts 23:14; Rom 9:3; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:22. For the verb: Mark 14:71; Acts 23:12, 14, 21. Morland masterfully summarizes various higher critical attempts to explain the meaning of Paul’s use of anathema in the context of other biblical curses. Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 1-9. My study will not attempt to describe and counter these views individually since they are similar to the Magical Curse View below. Brun went so far as to conclude that curses in the NT were remnants of ways of thinking that were passe and had been overcome in principle. Lyder Brun, *Segen Und Fluch in Urchristentum* (Oslo: Kommissjon hos Jacob Dybwad, 1932) 6, 134. “In diesem Zusammenhang werden wir auch die Entwicklung berühren müssen, die sich auf alttestamentlich- jüdischem Boden nachweisen lässt: von einer primitiven Auffassung zu einer (nach unserem Massstab) höheren, wo die althergebrachten Gedanken über Segen und Fluch durch die spätere Entwicklung der Religion und des Ethos modifiziert und abgeändert worden sind.” “In this connection we will have to touch also the development, which can be proven on Old Testament Jewish ground: from a primitive view (after our yardstick) to a higher one, where the traditional thoughts over blessing and curse were modified and amended by the later development of the religion and the ethos.” (p. 6).

¹⁹Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 25, 53-4.

²⁰Betz, *Galatians*, 25, 53, n. 90. The curse would include excommunication and certain death. He even says that this passage is “the first instance of Christian excommunication.” *Ibid.*, 54.

²¹James Thomas South II, “Corrective Discipline in the Pauline Communities” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1989), 193-5.

²²Betz, *Galatians*, 25, n. 125.

Paul's use of anathema being from the OT חרם .²³ Fourth, his worldview was Jewish and Scriptural, not “magical.”²⁴ Käsemann argues that the “original Sitz im Leben for sentences of this kind” is rooted in prophetic proclamation. To see the anathemas of Gal 1:8-9 as merely instances of documentation of Paul's magical worldview is just too easy a solution.²⁵ It also cheapens Paul's authority by comparing him to superstitious and powerless Jewish exorcists (Acts 19:14).

There are still some aspects to commend in Betz's view. He appears to emphasize a direct correlation between Paul's anathematization and some effect it had on his opponents. The effect appears to be supernatural and imminent. This would rule out anathematization as merely of a sociological effect (excommunication). On the other hand, his view does seem to support some sociological effect prescribed in Gal 1:8-9 as avoidance of association with the seducer. How could one get the idea that it was still appropriate to continue to “hang out” with this cursed person?

However, Betz still seems to come up short in explaining the central issue of anathema. By placing his emphasis on Hellenistic backgrounds, he ignores its Old Testament and Jewish background. Ezra 10:8 and *m. Sanhedrin* 10 place clearer parameters on anathema than his magical view.²⁶

Anathema as a Sentence of Holy Law View

The “anathema as a sentence of holy law” view brings to light some of the most important issues concerning anathema in this context. Käsemann argues that within the New Testament there is a pattern of what he calls “sentences of holy law.”²⁷ South aptly summarizes Käsemann's view of the anathema as a “proclamation of the law of God which is operative.” Käsemann believes that Paul does not intend by his curse to “bring about the sentence of condemnation, he merely announces the way things are.”²⁸ He supports his position by using 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If a man has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed”; 3:17, “If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him”; and 14:38, “If a man does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”²⁹ Paul sees himself not only as a representative of Christ having “the

²³ See below and Anderson, “Is Anathematization a Tool for the Evangelical Theologian Today?” 19-82.

²⁴ It is also interesting to note that for as little time Brichto spends on *herem* in his famous *SBL* monograph, he rejects the similar magical interpretation of *herem* of Betz. H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of 'Curse' in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), 205.

²⁵ Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), 72, 76.

²⁶ Anderson, “Is Anathematization a Tool for the Evangelical Theologian Today?” 66-73; 107-112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-81. For further development and critique of Käsemann's “sentences of holy law” see Robert M. Grant, “‘Holy Law’ in Paul and Ignatius,” in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders*, ed. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett (New York: The University Press of America, 1985), 65-71 and David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 294-296.

²⁸ South, “Corrective Discipline in the Pauline Communities,” 197. This is in direct agreement with Eadie's words back in 1869: “The preacher of another gospel exposes himself to the divine indignation, and the awful penalty incurred by him is not inflicted by man: he falls ‘into the hands of the living God.’” Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 28. See J. Gresham Machen, *Machen's Notes on Galatians* (1931-1932; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1972), 48.

authoritative power of blessing and cursing," but he understands this as a function of a specific law belonging to Christ the lawgiver.³⁰ Community law is divine law. To preach another gospel is to violate the divine/community law. The violator placed under anathema simply stands condemned by the existing divine/community law and its judicial consequences. For Käsemann, Paul is not enacting something new; he is authoritatively proclaiming the consequences revealed to him by God. He is simply exhorting in a powerful way, giving opportunity for repentance and an escape from eschatological judgment.³¹

This view retains the statutes of God's law in the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). It also parallels aspects of the Old Testament concept of קִרְיָה , where loyalty to God is paramount (Exod 22:20; Deut 7, 13; Ezra 10:8). However, in rejecting any community penalty, Käsemann's view ignores the fact that anathema might include disassociation or some sort of censure by the Galatian community. Käsemann's claim that the church is to be the instrument of holy law, not its executor, has truth in it. However, it over-stresses the role of the Spirit, and ignores the New Testament stress on community responsibility and consequences. The Spirit works through the community. Anathema, it seems, must also include some sort of response from the community.

Anathema as Excommunication View

The view of the meaning of anathema favored throughout church history and later Judaism has been excommunication.³² However, contemporary supporters have argued for it as well. Kiss states, "To declare the 'anathema' concerning someone, called for him to be considered excluded from the community."³³ His explanation for this is etymological and cultural:

The main emphasis of this concept in the time of Paul is placed on the one who renounces something, to consider something forbidden, what he does not want to touch and with what he wants to have nothing in common. It was not the curse in our contemporary sense of the word, that is to desire evil for him.³⁴

Another argument in support ties the synagogue ban discussed earlier to excommunication.³⁵

Arguments against this view are etymological and contextual. Tracing anathema back to the Old Testament קִרְיָה , Behm argues for a view beyond church discipline as excommunication. He cites Paul's use of $\text{\u0391\u03a0\u039e \u03a4\u039e\u03a5 \u03a7\u03a1\u0399\u03a3\u03a4\u039e\u03a5}$ in Rom 9:3 and the fact that angels and Christ Himself might be accursed.³⁶ Thus, anathema cannot be equated simply with excommunication. South

²⁹His comment on this last passage demonstrates his argument further. "It is now a matter of recognizing and acknowledging that it is precisely the Spirit who creates such an ordinance and makes possible in the Church authoritative action and the erection of definite law." He adds that "He who does not do so is, by this very indication, shown not to be Spirit-filled and not a partaker of that election which announces itself in the possession of the Spirit." Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, 68-9.

³⁰Ibid., 70.

³¹Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 8.

³²Anderson, "Is Anathematization a Tool for the Evangelical Theologian Today?" 164-228.

³³Igor Kiss, "Der Begriff 'Fluch' in Neuen Testament" [The Concept of "Curse" in the New Testament]. *Communio Viatorum* 7 (spring 1964): 92.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Cf. Luke 6:22; John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2.

³⁶Behm, "anathema," 354-5. Cf. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 78.

agrees with most commentators who see Paul's inclusion of "an angel from heaven" as indicating that Paul had a broader view. He cites Mignard, who "has demonstrated conclusively that there is no evidence that anathema was ever used in the first century in a disciplinary sense, as in excommunication."³⁷ Mignard, however, overstates his case. He agrees with Eadie and Lightfoot that the idea of excommunication is not found until much later in Christian history.³⁸ However, see the earlier discussion in this chapter on first century Judaism.

Lightfoot shows how the definition of anathema changed from a proclamation of the way things are to excommunication.

In the course of time 'anathema', like the corresponding $\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$ underwent a change of meaning, getting to signify 'excommunicated,' and this is the common patristic sense of the word. It was not unnatural therefore, that the fathers should attempt to force upon St. Paul the ecclesiastical sense with which they were most familiar, as Theodoret does for instance, on I Cor. xvi. 22, explaining $\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\omega$ by $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{o}\tau\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\omega \tau\omicron\upsilon \kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omicron\upsilon \sigma\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma \tau\eta\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha\varsigma$.³⁹

In other words, anathema as ecclesiastical excommunication was an innovation. The primary focus of anathema then appears to be something other than excommunication. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to argue that dismissing some sort of disassociation as a desired effect of anathema is unwarranted.

Anathema as a Curse of Eschatological Judgment View

Perhaps the strongest view of the meaning of anathema is that it is a curse devoting the offender to eschatological judgment. The curse is an invocation or promise of divine judgment whereby someone is "devoted to God without hope of being redeemed" and thus "doomed to destruction."⁴⁰ In other words, at death the offender goes straight to hell. *The Good News Bible* renders it, "Let him be condemned to hell!" and the NIV renders it, "Let him be eternally condemned." George argues that "it means nothing less than to suffer the eternal retribution and judgment of God."⁴¹

This view is supported by various means. First, it is supported by aspects of the Old Testament concept of $\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$. When someone was placed under *herem*, they were, for the most part, dedicated to destruction and thus were killed.⁴² The Old Testament concept of $\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$ also is used eschatologically, especially of the promises of the destruction of God's enemies.⁴³

³⁷South, "Corrective Discipline in the Pauline Communities," 199; J. E. Mignard, "Jewish and Christian Cultic Discipline to the Middle of the Second Century" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1966), 34-41.

³⁸South, "Corrective Discipline in the Pauline Communities," 199-200.

³⁹Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 78.

⁴⁰William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 47, n. 22.

⁴¹George, *Galatians*, 99.

⁴²Deut 2:23; 3:6; 7:2, 26; 13:12-18; Num 21:1-3; 25:1-18; Josh 2:10; 6:17, 18, 21; 7:1, 11-13, 15; 8:28; 10:28, 29-43; 11:20, 21-23; 22:20; Judg 1:19; 21:11; 1 Sam 15; 1 Kings 9:21; 20:42; 2 Kings 19:11; 1 Chr 4:41; 2 Chr 20:22; Isa 11:15; 34:2, 5; 37:11, 26, 33-35, 38; 43:28; Jer 25:9; 50:21, 26; 51:3; Dan 11:44; Zech 14:11; Mal 4:6.

⁴³Isa 11:15; 34:2, 5; 43:28; Jer 25:9; 50:21, 26; 51:3; Dan 11:44; Zech 14:11; Mal 4:6. See also the eschatological contexts where the spoil as a result of the war-*herem* (Mic 4:13; Ezek 44:29).

Second, it squares with concepts in extrabiblical literature. Dedication to destruction as death is prevalent.⁴⁴ In *m. Sanhedrin* 10, discipline is the result of having “no place in the world to come.”⁴⁵

Third, several of the New Testament anathemas intimate eschatological judgment. Peter's self-cursing is seen as his devotion of himself to ruinous destruction at the future day of judgment or reckoning. In Acts 23, Paul's would-be assassins used the same curse, and most scholars do not regard this as a self-excommunication curse. Paul's self-imprecation in Romans 9:3 would have him eternally separated from Christ. Paul's similar curse in 1 Corinthians 16:22 is tied to the eschatological *Μαρὰν θά* showing that those who do not love the Lord would be devoted to the Lord's rejection and judgment at His coming.⁴⁶

I am in basic agreement with this view. It has strong support that coincides with the conclusion I have drawn so far in this study. With that said, however, there are aspects that remain unexplained. First, the aspect of the imminency of the judgment of God is not clearly addressed. In the New Testament examples, the self-cursings can also be seen as devotion to immediate divine retribution as well as a ruinous destruction at the future day of judgment. In *m. Sanhedrin* 10, those who have no place in the world to come faced imminent punishment by execution by stoning or the sword.

Second, this view does not account for a community response to the anathematized offender. Technically, in this context a community response is separate from the meaning of anathema itself. However, the Old Testament concepts of taboo and defilement associated with *חַרָּם*/anathema in Lev 27:28 and all property, as well as confiscation of property and disassociation from the offender in Ezra 10:8, argue for a broader view of its intended result. The discussion on Ezra 10:8 indicates that the reason the anathema included confiscation of property and subsequent banishment from the community was the fear of God's imminent retribution.⁴⁷ Paul's clear responses to false teaching indicate that he knew the consequences of imminent divine retribution. As a result of these deficiencies, I have chosen to hold to a more holistic view.

Anathema as Relegation to Imminent Divine Retribution View

The clear themes of the meaning of anathema need to be recognized and tied together into a holistic view. It seems best to view the meaning of anathema as Paul's relegation of his dangerous opponents to God's imminent retribution. My definition is clarified the following points. First, by relegation to retribution, I mean that Paul himself is not enacting and performing the retribution. Anathema stresses what the offender faces before God, not the one

⁴⁴*1 Macc.* 5:5; *Sir.* 16:9; 39:30; 46:6; CD ix. 1; 1QM ix.6-7; svii.5; 11QTemple lxii.13-16; lv.2-14; *Bib. Ant.* 26:2; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 62:1-3; *1 Enoch* 6:4-6; *Sanh.* 10:4-5. See also the eschatological contexts of 1QM ix.6-7; svii.5; 11QTemple lxii.13-16; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 62:1-3; *1 Enoch* 6:4-6; *Sanh.* 10:1.

⁴⁵For apocalyptic themes, George cites 1QS 2.5-17 even though it does not include *herem*/anathema. George, *Galatians*, 99, n. 36.

⁴⁶Stott even cites the parallel in Jesus' words in Mark 9:42 concerning the millstone hung around the necks of those who cause others to stumble. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1968), 26.

⁴⁷Cf. 1QM ix.6-7; svii.5; 11QTemple lv.2-14.

uttering the curse. Paul's dealings with false teachers demonstrates this. Tarazi captures this idea best when he states, "By issuing the anathema Paul is relegating the whole matter to the judgment of God Himself, who is the sole dispenser of curses as well as blessings."⁴⁸

In opposition, Galatians 6:16 relegates those who walk as new creatures to the peace and mercy that can only come (ἐπι) from God. However, this is not to say that Paul's authority as an apostle has no bearing (Gal 1:1; 2:7). His authority from Christ lends weight to this sober imperative. Rather it demonstrates that Paul believed something would happen to the anathematized offender. On the other hand, Paul was responsible to communicate the anathematization to the offender and to the community.

In this imminent divine retribution view, anathema is a curse, the relegation or handing over of the offender to God's retribution. The traditional phraseology of "devotion to God's judgment" is appropriate when understood not as an optative or as Paul's wish, but as a true curse. Paul is actively referring the offender to God, the divine judge, for his judicial decision. Dorskocil argues this when he states,

Wir haben keine Veranlassung, die sachliche Bedeutung des anathema in irgendeiner Form abzuschwächen. Es steht auch hier in der vollen Wucht seiner urtümlichen Bedeutung, von der Auslieferung an den "Richterzorn Gottes."⁴⁹

The outcome of Paul's decision has already been revealed in the pattern of the Old Testament as discussed in the eschatological view above.⁵⁰

Second, by imminent retribution, I mean near and thus potentially immediate. The anathematized could experience divine retribution in this life⁵¹ just as they could experience God's blessings in this life (i.e., Gal 6:16). It could be at minimum the fulfillment of deuteronomistic curses: the removal of God's blessing and even death. At that point eschatological retribution would take place. Behnisch argues that it is a prophetic sentence, the curse-condition of salvation-less death.⁵² In other words, there is an eschatological quality to this anathema, since the Galatians had already experienced the salvation power of the gospel.

⁴⁸Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary*, Orthodox Biblical Studies (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1994), 33.

⁴⁹"We do not have any reason to weaken the objective meaning of anathema in any form. It is also here in the full force of its original meaning, from the handing over to the 'wrath of God as judge.'" Walter Dorskocil, *Der Bann in Der Urkirche* (Munich: Kommissionsverlag Karl Zink, 1958), 55. He is in disagreement with view that anathema is synonymous with the synagogue ban. He states, "Das tut Bornhäuser, Anathema esto! (Gal 1,8 u. 1 Kor 16,22): *Die Reformation* 26 (1932) 82, wenn er es im Sinne eines Synagogenbannes deutet und ihm die Bedeutung unterlegt: 'Den hört nicht an!'" (That is what Bornhäuser does in his article . . . , when he interprets it in the sense of a synagogue ban and the meaning, "Do not listen to them!" underlies it.). *Ibid.*, 55, n. 12. It should not be divorced from its OT context of relegation to God's wrath.

⁵⁰To use "devoted to destruction" seems to imply too final a judgment and may illegitimately imply annihilation.

⁵¹Ridderbos's anathema as a curse seems to be between being yielded or surrendered to God's wrath and excommunication (though not in the sense of ecclesiastical discipline, whatever he means by that). Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 50, n. 18. This does show his struggle with maintaining a too narrowly-focused view of anathema.

⁵²Martin Behnisch, "Fluch Und Evangelium: Galater 1, 9 Als Ein Aspekt Paulinischer Theologie" [Curse and Gospel: Galatians 1:9 As an Aspect of Pauline Theology], in *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift: Theologia Viatorum Neue Folge: Halbjahresschrift fuer Theologie in der Kirche* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1984), 1:252.

Therefore, it carries the weight of “eschatological horror,”⁵³ a fear of the ultimate consequence. This imminency fits with Ezra 10:8 and the process undertaken by Ezra due to his fear of God’s imminent retribution on the community for idolatrous intermarriages (cf. Num 25:1-13; Josh 6:18; 7:1, 11-12).

Third, divine retribution is a consistent theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. More specifically, to rob God of his honor in favor of false gods and/or false doctrine, automatically results in his retribution, or as Morland suggests his “divine sanctions.”⁵⁴

Further support for a relegation and imminent view is when Paul appears to curse others.⁵⁵ There are instances when Paul concludes the controversies with opponents who put the church in fundamental danger with a short and pointed statement of judgment.⁵⁶ For example, in Rom 3:8, he declares that “their judgment (κρίμα or condemnation) is just (ἐνδικόν or deserved)” upon those who have slandered Paul and his companions (cf. Rom 6:1-2). In 2 Corinthians 11:15b, Paul describes his Corinthian opponents as “false apostles,” “whose end will be according to their deeds” (NIV, “what their actions deserve”). In Philippians 3:18, 19a, he declares that the “end” (τέλος) of “the enemies of the cross” will be “destruction” (ἀπώλεια). Later, in Gal 5:10b, he declares, “The one who is disturbing (or confusing) you will heavily bear (βαστάσει) judgment (κρίμα).” Behnisch is correct in observing that although there is a formal difference between these pronouncements and the technical curses of the anathemas in Gal 1:8-9 and 1 Cor 16:22, they are functionally related. They are all “pronouncements of divine judgment caused by a falsification of the gospel, which Paul understands as an elementary threat to the spiritual reality of his congregation.”⁵⁷ He goes on to assert correctly,

These sentences are clearly more than mere accusations of the opponent and more than a reference to possible bad consequences of wrongdoing. Rather, the stereotyped saying of the apostle tells the heretics, like a prophet, of the intervention of God in advance, and makes that course of action an eschatological judgment already active.⁵⁸

In other words, Paul's pattern in his dealings with false teachers via pronouncements and anathemas is to declare God's immediate intervention as active eschatological judgment. Therefore God's right to enact its full consequences would be imminent.

It is my view that anathematization involves Paul's relegation or a handing over of the seducing Judaizers to God’s immediate and eschatological retribution. However, this argument also maintains that for the Galatians to maintain unbroken fellowship with the anathematized would be unthinkable. This implication leads us to the rhetorical force and desired effects of Paul's anathematization.

⁵³Ibid., 249.

⁵⁴Although there are a number of examples of this in both testaments, Deut 13:12-18 is especially important because it contains the apostasy theme and orders the death penalty for seducers with the term חַרֵּף. Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 236. Furthermore, it is important to note again the rabbis' attempt in *m. Sanhedrin* 10 to interpret the implications of this passage.

⁵⁵Behnisch, "Fluch und Evangelium," 243.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 244.

⁵⁸Ibid.

The Force and Desired Effects of the Anathemas

The force and desired effects of Paul's anathemas take the meaning of anathema out of the abstract. Morland calls these the "pragmatic aspects" of the anathema curse.⁵⁹ This is a necessary step for systematic theology in the formulation of the normative teaching and practice of anathematization for the church.

What is the idea behind a statement's *force*? It is the meaning inherent in how the author structures his statements (e.g., assertion, greeting, promise, command, etc.).⁶⁰ Austin describes this as the "way we are using the locution" or statement.⁶¹ Alston helpfully lists verbs and verb phrases that represent illocutionary actions (e.g., report, announce, predict, admit, etc.).⁶² Force is the determination of what the author intended the reader to perceive of the statement. In other words, it is the power of the statement felt by the reader or what the statement seeks to compel.

The issue here is how Paul intended the phrase ἔστω ἀνάθεμα to be taken. The present imperative ἔστω is enigmatic. In the NT, it can be used as an exhortation. Jesus literally exhorts his followers to "Let your statement be yes, yes, or no, no" (Matt 5:37). In a disciplinary context, He exhorts His disciples to "let (him) be to you as the Gentile and the tax-gatherer" (Matt 18:17).⁶³ James 5:12 is a nearly identical exhortation but uses ἦτω (See also 1 Cor 16:22 ἦτω ἀνάθεμα). There is also a series of "let it be known" exhortations that imply the idea "so give heed" or "mark my words" (Acts 2:14; 4:10; 13:38; 28:28).⁶⁴ In other words, what the author was about to say is to be accepted and acted upon. Depending on how 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:8, 9 are taken, there is only one instance of an imprecation or curse. Peter cites Psalm 69:25, "And don't let him be the one dwelling in it," as a precedent referring to the homestead of Judas. In this curse, David calls upon God to do something to his enemies out of His righteous anger (Ps 69:24-28).

The difficulty with the Galatians 1 construction is that it appears to be a curse with an exhortation instruction. *Herem* denotes a devotion, a relegation or a handing over of someone to God's retribution. It is not an optative hope that God might do something. Paul is exercising his faith in God's just judgment, just as he does in trusting Jesus for the deliverance "out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4). Thus, as a curse, it could be rendered, "By faith in the Lord, I hand these people over to His just judgment." It is hard to tell if the Lord is the expressed audience of this present imperative, however. Paul could be uttering an exhortational instruction to the Galatians in keeping with other uses of ἔστω. It could be rendered, "Galatians, by faith, hand over these people with me to God's just judgment." This would not only be in keeping with the exhortational use of ἔστω elsewhere, but also with the community responsibility seen in the Ezra 10:8 use of *herem*.

⁵⁹Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 237.

⁶⁰Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 209.

⁶¹Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 98.

⁶²William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 35.

⁶³See also in the LXX, Num 18:9; Prov 5:17; Wis 2:9, 11; Sir 4:31; 5:10, 12; 9:15, 16; 33:31; Joel 4:11; Ezek 45:10.

⁶⁴See also in the LXX for example, 1 Esdr 2:3, 14; 6:8; Ezra 4:12, 13; 5:8.

In any case, the minimal force of these anathemas is to urge the Galatians to regard these troubling seducers as cursed persons.⁶⁵ It is as if Paul is saying, “Regard them as being handed over to God’s imminent retribution!”

What is the idea behind a statement’s *desired effects*? It is the determination of the author’s foreseen results of his statement.⁶⁶ Granted, absolute certainty is elusive in this area. Yet, as I have shown, Paul could appeal to anathema as a biblical and cultural concept with confidence. Paul not only means something by it, and the Galatians not only receive an impression of the force of that statement Paul wants them to respond to his statement (in this case the imperative ἐστω). Vanhoozer argues that viewing the Bible as “Scripture” focuses on the perlocutionary function of communicative action. “That is, Scripture intends, by and through its communicative action, to function in a way that leads to Christ and to the righteousness of God All texts . . . have a certain claim on the reader.”⁶⁷ The Spirit of God would not only to press upon the reader the illocutionary point but also achieve in the obedient, the perlocutionary effect.⁶⁸

Exegetical observations illumine several elements of the desired effects. First, Paul is using casuistry (if . . . then . . .), and thus seeks a moral response due to the curses being in two conditional sentences. The first statement is a third class hypothetical condition (ἐὰν with aorist subjunctive), whereas the second is a first class (εἰ with present indicative) assertion of a fact for the sake of his argument, which could be stated, “whoever is preaching to you”⁶⁹ Thus the second statement takes the anathematization out of the hypothetical and makes it axiomatic. Morland observes that the clauses in 1 Cor 16:22 and Gal 1:8, 9 are models of casuistic laws where the crime is defined in the protasis, and its distinctive curse penalty prescribed in the apodosis.⁷⁰ Therefore, the anathemas, like all divine laws, are intended to elicit a response from the community to which they are given. They are not simply provided as resulting penalties, but as with all laws, opportunities for moral decision.

A second element of the desired effect is in Paul’s self-imprecation, “But even if we . . . should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be anathema.” Why would Paul apply the curse to himself? First, the third class condition indicates that his self-imprecation is similar in purpose to the one he uses in Rom 9:3. If it were possible that he could have brought them a different gospel, then he would be anathematized. Like the impossibility of his becoming an atonement for Israel’s unbelief in Romans 9:3, it is impossible for Paul’s gospel to be anything but from God as he argues in Gal 1:11-2:21. Calvin is helpful at this point in showing the necessity of Paul’s potential self-imprecation.

It was also necessary for him to begin with himself. In this way he anticipates a slander from his ill-wishers: “You want to have everything that comes from you received without hesitation because it is your own.” To show that there is no foundation for this, he is the first to surrender the right to advance anything against his teaching. By doing so, he does

⁶⁵Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 237.

⁶⁶Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 254. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 101.

⁶⁷Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 380.

⁶⁸Ibid., 428.

⁶⁹Paul seems to indicate an ongoing crisis unfolding in Galatia even as he wrote. George, *Galatians*, 99.

⁷⁰Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians*, 30.

not subject himself to others, but, as is fair, puts them all along with himself into one rank, that they should be subject to the Word of God.⁷¹

The test of orthodoxy applies to everyone who might pervert the gospel, and failure implies anathematization. Paul subsequently shows that his gospel bears up under scrutiny. The Galatians should choose his over that of the anathematized Judaizers.

A third element of his desired effects is in the angelic anathematization. Why potentially anathematize angels? Eadie's words are instructive: "An angel from heaven is the highest created authority, but it cannot exalt itself against a divine commission."⁷² Angels were instrumental in mediating the law from God (Gal 3:19). Paul later indicates that he was well aware of Satan masquerading as an angel of light who by deception leads many sincere believers away from their pure devotion to Christ.⁷³ In other words, even seducing angelic messengers are to be anathematized.

There is an important Old Testament precedent concerning angelic mediation. During the apostate reign of Jeroboam, the lying old prophet claimed to have received the word of the Lord by means of an angel. His intent was to cause the man of God to disobey the Lord's expressed command to disassociate himself from Bethel and its idolatry (1 Kings 13:11-34, esp. 18). Subsequently, immediate divine retribution came upon the man of God for his disregard of the warning of the Lord when he was mauled and killed by a lion (18:24-26). The principle of immediate divine retribution upon those who disregard the Lord's word in favor of those of a messenger claiming angelic mediation is identical to Paul's argument in Gal 1:8-9. In light of the angelic anathematization (and possibly from this precedent as well), Paul desired the Galatians to avoid associating with the seducers (the Judaizers) and thus avoid God's imminent retribution.

Plainly, the desired effect of these anathemas is a call for a decision to doctrinal allegiance and the refusal to listen to false teaching. Paul is not so much attempting to dissuade the false teachers (though if they read the letter and its anathemas it might) but to dissuade their audience from listening. Paul gives a blessing at Galatians 6:16, which coupled with the curse at the beginning, leaves no doubt in the minds of the Galatians as to what choice they must make. However, there is a crucial question of implication: Exactly how are they to avoid these teachers without disassociating themselves from them?

The central element of the desired effect of these anathemas is for the Galatians to choose between Paul and his gospel and the Judaizers and their gospel. He wants them to realign themselves with himself and his gospel and disassociate from the opponents and their teaching. In the rest of the epistle, he shows them exactly what it was that they are to reject.

Conclusions

A survey of the anathemas in the NT and Paul's prescriptions of anathema in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:8, 9 answer the important questions raised at the outset. It is a self-curse and prescription for false teachers and any who are disloyal to God or Christ. Like the OT and first century Judaism it has imminent and eschatological consequences. However, the

⁷¹John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians and Colossians*, Calvin's Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (1548; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 15.

⁷²Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 25.

⁷³George, *Galatians*, 98. Cf. 2 Cor 11:3 and 14.

anathemas in Gal 1:8, 9 encapsulate anathematization for the theologian. There, Paul uses anathemas against the Judaizers who seduced, deserted and perverted. The anathematization is his relegation or handing over to God of opponents of the true gospel for His imminent and eschatological retribution. The force of these anathemas (present imperatives) is an exhortational instruction to the Galatian churches to regard these opponents as cursed persons. Therefore, Paul's desired effect of these anathemas is for these churches to choose between him and his gospel and the Judaizers and their "gospel." He wants nothing more than for them to realign themselves with him and his gospel, to reject the Judaizers and disassociate themselves from them and their teaching. By doing this, they will avoid God's imminent retribution.

The implications of this teaching for evangelical theologians today is challenging. It should be clear that the same OT principles are at work in the NT. There is an expectation of their application by all Christians. Therefore, the church practiced anathematization during the following millennia. The Evangelical church must answer the following questions: When should it be put into practice? Why was put it into practice and upon whom? Who is to put anathematization into practice? The answers will help us guard the truth of the gospel and the honor of the mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.