

Galatians Chapter 3

Verses 3:1 – 4:31: In the first two chapters, Paul has argued that his gospel is the true one. Now the question is: “What is Paul’s gospel?” So (in chapters 3 and 4), the apostle defines his gospel. In short, it is that justification (salvation), comes as the result of one’s faith in Christ, not as a result of trying to obey the law.

Paul argues this point by appealing to the Galatians’ own experience (3:1-5), to Old Testament Scripture (3:6-14), to the Abrahamic covenant (3:15-18), to the purpose of the law (3:19-29), to the law’s temporary nature (4:1-11), and to allegory (4:21-31).

Galatians 3:1 "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"

“Foolish”: This refers not to lack of intelligence, but to lack of obedience (Luke 24:25; 1 Tim. 6:9; Titus 3:3). Paul expresses his shock, surprise, and outrage at the Galatians’ defection.

Foolish does not denote natural stupidity, but failure to use moral and spiritual discernment. “Bewitched” means to cast an evil spell on someone. Paul is thus saying that the only way to account for their theological deception is by malicious magic.

“Who”: The Judaizers, the Jewish false teachers were plaguing the Galatian churches.

“Bewitched”: Charmed or misled by flattery and false promise. The term suggests an appeal to the emotions by the Judaizers.

“Set forth”: The posting of official notices in public places. Paul’s preaching had publicly displayed the true gospel of Jesus Christ before the Galatians.

The Greek word rendered “hath been evidently set forth”, means to show forth as on a placard (billboard). The message of salvation had been set forth before the Galatians’ “eyes” (spiritual understanding), as on a billboard. They had clearly understood the gospel, now they were confused about it.

Paul is not calling these Galatians a fool, but is saying that their actions are foolish. Foolish means to give the appearance of a fool. Paul reminds them that they have been blessed with the glorious Truth.

“Crucified”: The crucifixion of Christ was a one-time historical fact with continuing results into eternity. Christ’s sacrificial death provides eternal payment for believer’s sins (Heb. 7:25), and does not need to be supplemented by any human works.

God thought enough of them that He sent Paul to them to open their eyes to the Truth of God. Paul had taught Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As we said before, Paul taught that Jesus

fulfilled the law. He became the substitute for our sin. The law was fulfilled and all who believe live in the grace of God.

Galatians 3:2 "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

“Received ye the Spirit”: The answer to Paul’s rhetorical question is obvious. The Galatians had received the Spirit when they were saved (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 John 3:24; 4:13), not through keeping the law, but through saving faith granted when hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:17).

The hearing of faith is actually hearing “with” faith. Paul appealed to the Galatians’ own salvation to refute the Judaizers’ false teaching that keeping the law is necessary for salvation.

Paul appeals to the Galatians’ own spiritual experience to argue salvation by faith. Note that here the apostle refers to salvation by the reception of the Spirit. Why? Because the moment one is converted he receives the Holy Spirit. By a question, Paul states that they received the Spirit not “by the works of the law” (meritorious or good works), but “by the hearing of faith” (as a result of their faith).

Look with me, at the Scriptures which describe exactly what happens to those who are believers.

Ephesians 1:13-14 "In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise," "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Paul is attempting to make them realize that the law was of the flesh and true Christianity is of the Spirit. Why would anyone who had known the Spirit of God go back to a fleshly religion of ordinances? The answer is so obvious in verse 2 above. The Spirit comes through faith, and not works.

Galatians 3:3 "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

“Are ye so foolish”: Incredulous at how easily the Galatians had been duped, Paul asked a second rhetorical question, again rebuking them for their foolishness.

“Begun in the Spirit ... by the flesh”: The notion that sinful, weak (Matt. 26:41; Rom. 6:19), fallen human nature could improve on the saving work on the Holy Spirit was ludicrous to Paul.

That which they have “begun in” [by], “the Spirit” is the Christian life. To be “made perfect by the flesh” is to bring the Christian life to successful completion by human achievement and one’s religious accomplishments. Paul’s rhetorical question denies the possibility; one begins and ends his Christian career through the work of God’s Spirit.

The Spirit that fell at Pentecost was jubilee, as well. It set them free from the bondage of the law. It empowered them to minister. What a foolish thing to even consider giving up the freedom of the Spirit to go back into the bondage of the law. The flesh has nothing to offer, but suffering. Hope comes through the Spirit.

Hebrews 7:19 "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope [did]; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

Galatians 3:4 "Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if [it be] yet in vain."

“Suffered”: The Greek word has the basic meaning of “experience,” and does not necessarily imply pain or hardship. Paul used it to describe the Galatians’ personal experience of salvation in Jesus Christ.

“Many things”: This refers to all the blessings of salvation from God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:3).

“It be yet in vain” (see Luke 8:13; Acts 8:13, 21; 1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 6:1; 13:5-6).

This verse could be translated, “Have you experienced so many wonderful things without effect? If so, then it really would be to no avail.” The “wonderful things” experienced are an understanding of the gospel (verse 1), reception of the Spirit (verse 2), and seeing miracles performed in their midst (verse 5).

Should they try to earn salvation by good works, then all these “wonderful things” they have experienced would have had no positive influence on them.

It seems that the suffering spoken of here, is the persecution of the Christians by the Jews. It was not a popular thing to be a Christian. Much ridicule came against them. Paul is saying, why did you suffer all of that to turn back now?

Galatians 3:5 "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

“Hearing of faith” (see note on verse 2).

“Ministereth” (or, supplies): God gives the Spirit to new converts and “worketh miracles among” the readers not “by” [because of] “the works of the law,” but “by” [as a result of], “the hearing of faith.”

Paul is reminding them, that his ministry was accompanied with signs and wonders. There was no healing going on in the Jewish synagogue. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Jesus had said; your faith has made you whole, when He healed them. Faithful Abraham was accepted, because of his faith, not because of his works.

Faith is the key to receive anything from God.

Acts 19:11-12 "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:" "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

Paul's ministry was one of many miracles. The Jewish faith brought no miracles. What proof did they need?

Galatians 3:6 "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

As he does in Romans (see note on Rom. 4:30), Paul quoting (Gen. 15:6), uses Abraham as proof that there has never been any other way of salvation than by grace through faith. Even the Old Testament teaches justification by faith.

“Even as” (or, “just as”): These two words draw a similarity between the Galatians and Abraham: they received the Spirit by faith (3:2, 5), “just as” Abraham received “righteousness.” This verse quotes (Genesis 15).

15:6: When “Abraham believed God,” his faith “was accounted” [credited, reckoned] “to him for” [as] “righteousness.”

Righteousness is the moral condition in which one ought to be, hence, that state acceptable to God.

Romans 4:3 "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

We know that all those who ever pleased God did so because they believed. Read (Hebrew Chapter 11), and you will see a long list of those who put their faith in God.

"Righteousness", means being in right standing with God. The Christians are righteous, because they are washed in the blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ). They have placed their faith in Jesus.

Galatians 3:7 "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."

Believing Jews and Gentiles are the true spiritual children of Abraham because they follow his example of faith (verse 29; Rom. 4:11, 16).

The verse may read: “therefore recognize that those who believe, these only, are Abraham’s sons.”

If we are truly the children of Abraham, then we must believe the same thing he believed. The one thing that set Abraham aside from all others was that he believed God. The thing that should separate all believers in Christ from the rest of the world is that we believe Christ. We are like Abraham in the fact that we have faith in God, and faith that what He promised He will do.

Galatians 3:8 "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed."

“Scripture, foreseeing”: Personifying the Scriptures was a common Jewish figure of speech (4:30; John 7:38, 42; 19:37; Rom. 7:17; 10:11; 11:2; 1 Tim. 5:18). Because Scripture is God’s Word, when it speaks, God speaks.

“Preached before the gospel unto Abraham”: The “good news” to Abraham was the news of salvation for all the nations (quoted from Gen. 12:3; 18:18; see Gen. 22:18; John 8:56; Acts 26:22-23). Salvation has always, in every age, been by faith.

“Preached before the gospel” is better said, “announced good news beforehand.” Paul equates “justify” with being “blessed.”

The physical house of Abraham is just one nation. The Hebrew nation is the physical house of Abraham. They are the physical house of Israel. All believers in Christ make up the spiritual house of Israel and are the nations, plural, mentioned here as nations blessed through Abraham. We are children of Abraham, because we have faith as he had faith.

Galatians 3:29 "And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

This seed of Abraham is in the spirit realm. Jesus is the seed spoken of. The justification of the heathen is in Jesus Christ, because they believed.

Galatians 3:9 "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

“They which be of faith ... with faithful Abraham”: Whether Jew or Gentile. The Old Testament predicted that Gentiles would receive the blessings of justification by faith, as did Abraham. Those blessings are poured out on all because of Christ (John 1:16; Rom. 8:32; Eph. 1:3; 2:6-7; Col. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:9; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

This verse might be, “so then they who believe are blessed along with believing Abraham”, that is, they are justified.

Faith pleases God.

Romans 4:16 "Therefore [it is] of faith, that [it might be] by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,"

Read the 4th chapter of Romans beginning with about the 15th verse to get the full impact of this. In fact, it continues on in the 5th chapter as well for a few verses. The fact is, if we believe as Abraham believed, then the covenant promises made to Abraham are ours as well through faith.

Galatians 3:10 "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

“As many as are of the works of the law”: Those attempting to earn salvation by keeping the law.

“Under the curse” (quoted from Deut. 27:26), to show that failure to perfectly keep the law brings divine judgment and condemnation. One violation of the law deserves the curse of God (Deut. Chapters 27 and 28).

“All things” (see James 2:10). No one can keep all the commands of the law, not even strict Pharisees like Saul of Tarsus (Rom7:7-12).

“As many as are of the works of the law” refers to all who rely upon obedience to the Mosaic Law as the means of winning divine approval (salvation). To be “under the curse” is to be subject to God’s wrath and condemnation. “Continueth” is explained by “to do,” which means “to obey.”

The recipient of divine wrath is “everyone” who, believing salvation can be obtained by meritorious works, fails to obey the law perfectly. Complete obedience to the law is impossible for sinful man (Acts 15:10; James 2:10). All then, who attempt to secure salvation by this route are doomed.

The law was impossible to live up to. If you are under the law, you would be cursed if you did not do every little thing the exact way it was given. Even in the Old Testament, we find that to obey God was better than sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey [is] better than sacrifice, [and] to hearken than the fat of rams."

God wanted our love and loyalty from the beginning. He wanted us to have unwavering faith in Him. Every time I read the law that was given Moses, I praise God for the gift of grace through faith. There would be no way to remember all of the sacrifices and ordinances, much less keep them.

Galatians 3:11 "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

“No man is justified by the law” (Rom. 3:20).

“Justified”: Made righteous before God.

“The just shall live by faith” (see note on Rom. 1:17). Paul’s earlier Old Testament quote (verse 10; Deut. 27:26), showed that justification does not come from keeping the law; this quote (from Hab. 2:4), shows that justification is by faith alone (Heb. 10:38).

The last part of this verse means, "He who is just because of his faith shall live," that is, forever.

There is no one who ever completely kept the law, it is an impossibility.

Isaiah 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The law condemns, grace sets us free.

Romans 8:2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Romans 5:21 "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The law brings death to the law breaker. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ brings life eternal.

Galatians 3:12 "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them."

Justification by faith and justification by keeping the law are mutually exclusive, as Paul's Old Testament quote from (Lev. 18:5) prove.

This verse declares that the law is a matter of performance, not of faith; it is a principal of doing, not believing.

The law is obligations and ordinances. Those who are under the law must keep every single one of them.

Galatians 3:13 "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed [is] every one that hangeth on a tree:"

On this scripture (Deut. 21:23 is quoted).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law": The Greek word translated "redeemed", was often used to speak of buying a slave's or debtor's freedom.

Christ's death, because it was a death of substitution for sin, satisfied God's justice and exhausted His wrath toward His elect. So that Christ actually purchased believers from slavery to sin and from the sentence of eternal death (4:5; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12).

"Being made a curse for us": By bearing God's wrath for believers' sins on the cross (see note on 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), Christ took upon Himself the curse pronounced on those who violated the law (see note on verse 10).

“For it is written”: The common New Testament way (61 times), of introducing Old Testament quotes (see note on Rom. 3:10).

“The curse of the law”, from which “Christ hath redeemed” [delivered] “us,” is that of verse 10, incurred because of incomplete obedience to the law. “Being made a curse for us” means “by becoming accursed for us.”

Jesus Christ is the redeemer of all who have faith in Him. He became our substitute on the cross. He took the sin of the whole world upon His body on the cross. The curse of the cross was the sin that we each laid upon Him. The Father turned away at the moment that the sin was placed upon the body of Jesus on the cross.

This was the moment Jesus said, Father why hast thou forsaken me? God had not turned away from the Spirit within the body, but had turned away from the sin upon the body. God cannot look upon sin. Sin died on the cross for all who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Accept the salvation Jesus offers you in the place of your sin.

Galatians 3:14 "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

“The blessing of Abraham”: Faith in God’s promise of salvation (see note on verse 9).

“Promise of the Spirit”: from God, the Father (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; 59:19-21; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Luke 11:13; 24:49; John 7:37-39; 14:16, 26).

The word “that” appears twice in this verse, identifying two reasons “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (verse 13):

- (1) that Gentiles might receive “the blessing of Abraham” (i.e., justification as in verses 8-9);
- (2) that believers “might receive ... the Spirit” (i.e., the indwelling of the Holy Spirit).

This implies that when one is justified, he is at the same time divinely granted the Holy Spirit.

The following Scriptures tell of the promises made to faithful Abraham. These are the promises to all believers in Christ, as well.

Genesis 12:2-3 "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Isaiah 44:3-4 "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:" "And they shall spring up [as] among the grass, as willows by the water courses."

1 Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Galatians Chapter 3 Questions

1. Is Paul calling them a fool? Explain.
2. What had Paul taught them?
3. Jesus became the _____ for our sin.
4. Received ye the Spirit by the _____ of the law, or by the _____ of faith?
5. After you believe, you are sealed with what?
6. What is the earnest of our inheritance?
7. Why does Paul say, they are foolish in verse 3?
8. The Spirit that fell at Pentecost was _____, as well.
9. With the Spirit there is _____.
10. With the law there is _____.
11. What does the author believe is the suffering spoken of in verse 4?
12. Without _____, it is impossible to please God.
13. God wrought special miracles by the hands of _____.
14. When handkerchiefs and aprons were brought to the sick from Paul what happened?
15. What was counted unto Abraham as righteousness?
16. What message is in the 11th chapter of Hebrews?
17. Who are the children of Abraham?
18. What set Abraham aside from all others?
19. God would justify the heathen through _____.
20. Who make up the spiritual house of Israel?
21. As many are as of the works of the law are under the _____.
22. The just shall live by _____.

23. All we like sheep have gone _____.
24. The law _____, grace sets us _____.
25. The law is _____ and _____.
26. Who is Jesus Christ the Redeemer of?
27. What were some of the blessings Abraham was promised?