

February 13, 2022

"Blessed with Abraham"
Lesson 2 of Unit

Galatians 3:1-14

Intro

There are several connections between Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians. They are similar in that Paul is showing the gospel in relation to the Jewish faith. But they are different in their presentation of this relation, in several important ways.

For one, the purpose in writing each letter is different. Romans is a broader, more general picture of salvation through faith. He shows that Jews and Gentiles both are under the condemnation of the law, as all have failed to keep the law, so have earned a judgment of death. Because of this situation, the only hope for salvation is through faith in Jesus' death on the cross leading to his resurrection. Paul writes to the Romans having never visited the city before.

Galatians, though, comes from a more personal place. Paul helped plant the churches in Galatia, so he knew these Christians personally. His letter confronts a problem rather than presenting a general defense of what the Gospel is. The problem was the Judaizers, those wanting Christian converts to keep the Jewish law in order to be saved. Instead of just explaining like in Romans, Paul is correcting the Galatians for accepting a false teaching about salvation.

Paul's defense for his ideas in both books comes from Old Testament passages. Justification by faith has its roots, its basis, in things written in the Old Testament. So the idea of justification by faith isn't something new in Jesus' day, not a departure from Old Testament teaching.

Read Galatians 3:1-14

1. vs. 1: Paul begins this section with a harsh critique, a scolding of the Galatians

He calls them "foolish"

They have been deceived ("bewitched")

Paul here asks the first of six rhetorical questions (ones that are asked not seeking an answer)

The issue is Jesus Christ and His crucifixion

Paul describes the crucifixion as "before your very eyes"

Paul has no doubt described it in very vivid terms

The Galatians have clearly seen the truth of this death to have accepted it earlier

They have now turned away from accepting / following this truth

2. vs. 2-3: Paul next asks about what led to their receiving the Holy Spirit

The Judaizers want them to follow the law

Paul asks rhetorically, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law?"

The obvious answer is "no"

They received the Spirit when they accepted Christ as Savior

He makes the difference between the two more obvious in his next question

"After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

The Galatians began their Christian lives with the receiving of the Holy Spirit

The “goal” he mentions in verse 3 is salvation

Can this goal be achieved through human effort?

Again, the obvious answer is “no”

The impossibility of keeping the law perfectly proves this can’t be done

3. vs. 4: Paul brings up the idea of “suffering so much for nothing”

Jews who became Christians rejected the law as a means of salvation

Those Jews who accepted the law could be harsh, even violent, to these “rebels”

Paul himself persecuted the church and killed its followers before his conversion

The Christians in Galatia have suffered, some physically, for obeying the gospel

Paul would have “suffered” for nothing as well if these Jews go back to the law

He has been beaten, imprisoned, etc. for the sake of the gospel

4. vs. 5: This question deals with causes and outcomes

Why did God give the Holy Spirit to these Galatians?

There are only two options

1—they observed the law

2—they heard the gospel and believed it

They never received the Spirit in all the years that they observed the law

The only logical answer is that they received the Spirit in response to hearing the gospel

Paul also mentions the working of miracles

There is no mention in any letter of the Judaizers working miracles

Paul worked miracles in healing a lame man in 14:10

Paul was brutally stoned in 14:19-20, yet he survived—a miracle

Miracles are signs used by the apostles to prove God’s moving through them

Miracles attest to God’s approval of what is said

Paul seems to be saying, “shouldn’t you guys follow the teacher whose message was accompanied to signs from God?”

5. vs. 6: The Jews consider themselves the children of Abraham

Paul therefore uses Abraham’s faith as an example

“He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6)

Abraham’s relationship with God was based on faith, not on works and the law

In Gal. 4:9-11, Paul shows that Gen. 15:6 came before Moses and the Law

If Abraham is the measure of a righteous person before God

And if Abraham was blessed by God by faith and not circumcision

The Judaizers are wrong in their insistence that Christians need to follow this law

6. vs. 7-8: Paul makes the next logical connection in this argument against the Judaizers

“Those who believe are children of Abraham”

Being a child of Abraham isn’t about being his physical descendant

The children of Abraham are children of faith

The covenant promise in Gen. 12:1-3 specifically notes that “all nations will be blessed through (Abraham).”

The shows God’s determination from the beginning:

The inclusion of all the peoples on the earth, by faith
This promise was made to Abraham 2000 years before Jesus came to the Earth
This is the message of the gospel—justification by faith, not works
Paul isn't preaching a new gospel, or one contrary to God's plans
This is the original, the truest, gospel message in the Scriptures

7. vs. 9: Paul concludes this section of thought by a reminder

“Abraham, the man of faith”

Righteousness comes through faith, not works of the law

All can come to this righteousness, not just Jews

8. vs. 10: The first 9 verses deal with faith first

This is the most important thing

In the last 5 verses, Paul addresses the faulty teaching of the Judaizers

He quotes Deut. 27:26, that whoever doesn't keep the law perfectly is cursed

This, as we all know, is impossible for humans

9. vs. 11: Paul then quotes Habbakkuk 2:4—“The just shall live by faith”

This verse shows again the OT emphasis on faith over works

The Judaizers are appealing to the Law as necessary for approval from God

God says in the OT he wants people of faith as His followers

Paul reminds the Galatians that “No one is justified before God by the law”

10. vs. 12: Paul explains how the law and faith are separate

“The law is not based on faith”

The law is based on works/actions

It becomes a transaction—“If I keep the law, you reward me”

But as it's impossible to keep the law perfectly, all are condemned to death

Faith provides a means of perfection apart from the law—See vs. 13

11. vs. 13: Paul presents the gospel message clearly

“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”

Christ hung on a tree (cross), so He was cursed

Paul notes that Jesus “became a curse for us”—he took our sins on himself

This changed our relationship to the law as well

We are no longer under the curse (death) of the law

We are under the blessing of faith in Christ's death for us

12. vs. 14: Paul concludes by showing that Christ's death that the promise to Abraham is fulfilled

This is true for Gentiles as well as for Jews

The promise was for Abraham to be a blessing to “all” nations

Paul shows the flaws in the Judaizers claims, using the OT law as proof

Application: Paul is concerned about people he cares about. The churches in Galatia were ones he helped to start, by preaching Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world.

A major part of that message was that people can never be “good” enough. We can be good for a while, or good in some areas. But we can never be perfect in all our actions. The Law of Moses was given for that purpose, to show people that even though they wanted to, they couldn’t follow God’s ways perfectly.

This is why Paul is so frustrated and concerned about the Galatians. They heard Paul preach this message originally, and they accepted faith in Christ’s atoning work as the only thing capable of saving them spiritually. Now they have gone back, listening to Judaizers telling them they have to follow the law in order to be saved. Paul’s letter instructs them again of what is true about faith and what is true about works.

This is key for us as well. We are called to be people of faith, to trust in what God through Jesus did for us. We can’t do anything in this life that will guaranty us salvation. Only Christ’s blood accomplished that for us.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for sending Jesus to pay the price for our sins, which the law required. Help us to daily be thankful for this gift, for the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives, for being true children of Abraham through faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.