

October 22, 2023

"Spirit and Flesh"
Lesson 3

Galatians 3:1-14

Intro

Today's passage is a continuation of Paul's main concern in writing to the Galatian churches: the false teaching and/or practice that it was necessary to keep the Jewish law to be saved. Paul counters that idea in this section by quoting three passages that show that the basis of our relationship to God is faith, not works. Paul's knowledge of OT scriptures enables him to demonstrate that the gospel message being proclaimed wasn't a radical departure from the Old Testament, but a continuation of what had always been said.

It's important to understand what the term "law" meant to Jews in Jesus' time. We understand the law to mean obeying rules and regulations regarding our conduct. This is also present in the OT law, but the primary purpose of the Law was to maintain a right relationship with God. To the Jews, beyond the laws concerning behaviors in relationships were the laws regarding worship and diet. Moral and ethical living was only a part of what the Jews thought of when they used the word "law".

Read Galatians 3:1-14

1. vs. 1: The word "foolish" used here means they knew the truth about Jesus but were not acting on it
 - This is a very serious mistake on their part, and Paul is highly concerned about them
 - The word "bewitched" means to fascinate, to enthrall, to entertain
 - Paul uses this word to describe the effect that the Judaizers words had on the Galatians
 - The people were being fooled in the same way a magician tricks his audience
 - Paul reminds them that he clearly showed them Jesus as the crucified Savior
 - They understood that teaching and responded to it correctly
 - Their error isn't in misunderstanding the teaching, but in abandoning it

2. vs. 2: Paul next asks a rhetorical question, which has an obvious answer
 - Did you receive the Spirit by your works, or by believing in what you heard?
 - Nowhere in the OT are works connected to receiving the Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit enters a believer because of their faith, not their works
 - The Galatians know this, and can only respond (mentally) to this question in one way
 - They received the Spirit based on what they heard, not on what they did

3. vs. 3: The word "flesh" in this verse can mean several things depending on the context
 - Here it means living in the world as a human being
 - Flesh here isn't good or bad; it's a morally neutral state—our bodies as bodies
 - Paul reminds them that their Christian lives began by receiving the Holy Spirit
 - They can't perfect or improve their Christian lives thru any human means
 - Trying to do so is going back to the OT ways of Law and deeds

4. vs. 4: Paul refers to what the Galatian Christians have experienced
 - He's likely referring to the persecution and suffering they received for becoming Christians
 - If they go back to the OT ways, that suffering will have been for nothing, of no value

5. vs. 5: Paul notes both the giving of the Spirit and the working of miracles among the Galatians
These things are presented as facts, as things that all know have already occurred
Neither of these things came from the teaching of the Judaizers
They came because of the faith the Galatians showed in what Paul preached
6. vs. 6: This is a quote of Gen. 15:6
Abraham is the beginning of the Hebrew people
If God tells Abraham he is righteous because he believed in God, that's what God requires
Abraham lived centuries before Moses, before the Law was introduced
Following the Law required that males be circumcised
Yet Abraham was before the law and was not circumcised
So Abraham was not counted righteous because of following the Law, but by faith
This example proves the Judaizers requirement of circumcision wrong
7. vs. 7: Paul now extends this example
All who demonstrate faith "are children of Abraham"
Faith is the defining quality of Abraham's life, and of what God wants of His followers
It is not a physical quality (circumcision) that gives salvation, but a spiritual quality
8. vs. 8: Here Paul reminds the Galatians (and Judaizers) that God always meant to include Gentiles also
"All nations will be blessed through you", God tells Abraham
This is what the gospel is all about—all who come to God in faith may receive salvation
This message came from God long before the Law and circumcision
Paul reminds them (and Judaizers) that he isn't preaching some new misguided message
This gospel is the same as was from the beginning of the Jewish nation
9. vs. 9: Paul here summarizes what he has been saying in chapter 3
Anyone, Jew or Gentile, who is faithful to Christ is blessed
This is not a departure from the Old Testament
This is what God told Abraham; this message is the foundation
10. vs. 10: Paul reminds the Galatians of what the law says about breaking the law
"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the...Law"
The reminder is that a person has to do everything in the Law
Failure to do everything results in being a lawbreaker and earning a curse
Following the law by being circumcised doesn't make up for other laws broken
The only escape from the curse is accepting the gospel based on faith, not works
11. vs. 11: Paul brings up another OT verse regarding faith from Habakkuk 2:4
"The righteous will live by faith"
Here is an OT prophet stating that faith is the standard of live lived by the righteous
It is not works which makes one righteous, but faith in God
12. vs. 12: The function of the law was to define what was sin
The law's purpose wasn't the development or application of faith
Later in Galatians, Paul says the law was given as a tutor to lead them to Christ
Life from the law happens only in perfect living—not even Paul was able to do this

13. vs. 13: The curse for breaking the law that Paul mentions in vs. 10 is death (see Rom. 6:23)

Here Paul reminds them that Christ's death redeemed us from that curse

Jesus became the curse that we all deserved as sinners

See Rom. 3:210-26

This is the Good News!

We are counted as righteous in God's eyes because of Jesus paying the curse

14. vs. 14: Paul's conclusion here connects Christ's work back to Abraham

God blessed Abraham and said he would be a father to many nations

He blessed Abraham for living a life of faith in worshipping God

He said that all nations would be blessed through Abraham

So here, Paul shows why Gentiles can come to salvation, through faith in Christ

This happens for Gentiles through receiving the Holy Spirit, as it does for all believers

Paul counters the Judaizers arguments about the law by using Scriptures from the law

Application: Some of us have likely fallen into the trap of thinking that if we just acted better, God would love us more. But that isn't where salvation is found, in works. We cannot gain salvation, forgiveness, or right standing with God by any of our works. We received the Spirit because of Jesus' gift following our response of faith in Him and His redemptive work, not because we cleaned up our lives or obeyed all the rules. The question to ask ourselves about this passage is, "Do we live and act based on the truth that Christ's work on our behalf is enough?"

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for any time we fall back into thinking we need to try to earn Your grace and forgiveness. Help us to live our lives in the faith that Jesus' sacrifice was enough, and that there is nothing else that needs to be added for our salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.