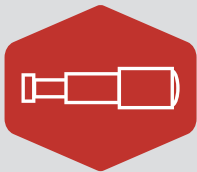




Lesson 6: Righteous by Faith

Main Idea: After Paul explained to the Galatians that all people, Gentiles and Jews alike, are justified by faith rather than the Law, Paul now reminds the Galatians how they began their journey of faith and urges them to continue living that same way. In this lesson, Paul shares what it meant to walk in right relationship with God.

Scripture: Galatians 3:1-14



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

Remember from reading Galatians 1 and 2 that Paul had started a group of churches in the Roman province of Galatia. Paul had left the province, and during his absence Judaizers had come to the church and tried to persuade the Galatian believers that Paul's message was insufficient, saying that after you received Jesus you must also be circumcised.

Our last lesson (Galatians 2:11-21) summarized the first two chapters of Paul's message to the Galatians: Faith in Jesus is enough. He asked why God would become a man, live among us, and suffer a humiliating death if a person still had to gain a relationship with Him through rules and rituals. Jesus is the rescuer needed for people to enter into relationship with Him.

In this session's verses (3:1-14), Paul makes the case that not only does salvation come by faith, but a believer's continued growth also comes by that same faith.

It is faith that helps a believer be more like Jesus—not effort, striving, or working hard to please Him. Paul communicates to the Galatians that how they started their faith journey is also how they should continue. Bible scholar and professor Robert K. Rapa states that in this section, “Paul will either succeed or fail to make his case for his gospel and the Galatians’ continued adherence to it.”¹ Everything in the letter thus far has led up to this point of asking the Galatians to carry on in the manner they started.

These verses could be summarized in one word: *believe*. To believe in God is, first, to see by the Spirit (Galatians 3:1-5). Second, it is not just to believe *in* God but to believe *on* the Person of Jesus (vv. 6-7). And, third, to believe is to escape the curse of the Law and experience the blessing of the Spirit (vv. 8-14).

In verse 1, Paul essentially asked the Galatians who cast a spell on them and turned their eyes away from the true message he preached about Jesus. Education Director for First Fruits of Zion, D. Thomas Lancaster, says, “The Judaizers have managed to dupe the gullible Galatians into believing this absurdity with the result that some of the Galatians have been backsliding, so to speak, into legalism.”²

To understand the Galatians’ experience with the Judaizers, consider the following vivid illustration of how a weasel captures prey. A weasel will dance mesmerizingly to distract the attention of its intended prey. The unsuspecting prey watches the dance until the weasel has worked its way close enough to make the kill. In like manner, the Judaizers came to Galatia and distracted the believers’ attention away from the Gospel and then went in in for the kill. In this analogy, the kill is the addition of circumcision to the salvation experience.

In verses 2-6, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions regarding whether the Galatians received the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith. Of course, the answer is the latter. When Paul uses the phrase “works of the law” (verse 2), he refers to the specific indicators of Jewish identity. New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener comments, “Paul appears appalled here. How could his converts who have already experienced the Spirit revert to seeking by fleshly means something they already received by trusting the gospel?”³

As supernatural as this sounds, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside believers through faith in what Jesus has done. The Holy Spirit moves people toward Jesus. Paul asks rhetorically in verse 2 when the Holy Spirit took up residence in the Galatians: when they kept the Law or when they believed the gospel?

1 Robert K. Rapa, “Galatians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*, rev. ed., vol. 11, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 580.

2 D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 110.

3 Craig Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 206.

Paul is reminding them that the sign of being a Christ-follower is the Holy Spirit within them.

In verse 3, Paul admonished the Galatians that if their faith journey began in the Spirit, it should also continue in the Spirit. This sheds light on Paul's theology of the Holy Spirit. Keener states, "Paul's theology of the Spirit describes not a one-off experience but rather a continued welcoming of this connection with the living God."⁴

Paul uses the word "perfected" (verse 3), which implies the idea of completeness. Being perfected does not mean attaining sinlessness but is instead a demonstration of growth and maturity in Christ. The way a person receives salvation is the same way maturity happens in a person's life: by the Spirit of God. The work of the Spirit separates the believer from someone who merely engages in personal works toward maturity.

In verse 4, Paul's rhetorical question: "Did you suffer so many things in vain?" reminds the Galatians of the value of faith placed in Jesus. Lancaster suggests that the message of Paul was, "If you're going to go ahead and convert, then what was the point of all that stigmatization that you suffered in the first place?"⁵

Verse 5 emphasizes faith as a lead-in to Paul's teaching on Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. Paul proceeds throughout these verses to bring up a number of passages from the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), and Keener notes that Paul does this "to establish the foundational character of his claim."⁶ In verse 6, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to remind them of the basis on which God considered Abraham righteous: his belief in the words and Person of God. Paul's point is that God's promise to Abraham came before Abraham's circumcision. Keener continues: "Abraham, like the Galatians, was in fact a Gentile when he was justified by faith."⁷ Abraham was a pagan when he chose to believe God but was given perfect righteousness through belief. Therefore, Paul writes in Galatians 3:7, the true sons of Abraham do not need to be circumcised but simply believe like Abraham believed.

Paul opens this next section of text, verses 10-14, by reminding the Galatians that relying on the Law results in death. It's important to note Paul is not saying that Law-keeping was wrong. What is wrong is relying on the Law for salvation. Relying on faith in Jesus, however, results in life. Paul's point is that the blessing of Abraham (who believed by faith) applies to the Galatians because they, too, accepted Jesus by faith. Paul was reminding the Galatians that these Scriptures about God's promise and Abraham's faith point to Jesus.

4 Keener, 218.

5 Lancaster, 115.

6 Keener, 223-224.

7 Keener, 225.

In verse 10, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 to warn the Galatians that if they revert to Judaism, they will be subject to the curses from Deuteronomy 27–28 unless they live out the Law completely. Galatians 3:11 points out that everyone is subject to these curses because no one is made right through law-keeping. Righteousness comes through faith—a point Paul makes by quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12, showing that the Judaizers believe their own law-keeping efforts bring them true life. Galatians 3:13 quotes the very specific pronouncement in Deuteronomy 21:23: “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” When that Scripture was written, Roman crucifixion had not been invented. Instead, to demonstrate that someone was cursed during the time Deuteronomy was written, the person would be hung up on a pole or tree. This action did not bring the curse upon them but simply showed that they were already accursed. Paul references Deuteronomy 21:23 to explain that Scripture ultimately points to Jesus, who went to a cross as the cursed One of God.

God gave Jesus the curse due to Jewish believers, and in doing so He also opened the Abrahamic blessing to the Gentiles—to people from every tribe and nation. Lancaster says it this way:

Our Master became, so to speak, accursed, in that he took upon himself the accursedness of his people and suffered on behalf of all those under the curse of the law—and not only for the Jewish people, but for all who will believe in him and rely upon his faithfulness.⁸

It was the ultimate exchange: Jesus received the curse, and humanity received the blessing.

⁸ Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians*. 162.

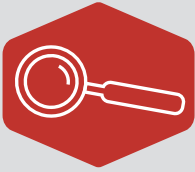


My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- Before we can truly live the Christian life, we need to picture Jesus' death on the Cross (Galatians 3:1-5).
- The key to growth is finding our source of life and strength in the Lord (v. 3).
- God acts in response to faith, not by works of the law (v. 5).
- The Spirit is the source of the miracles (v. 5).
- Because of faith, we are now made righteous in God's sight (vv. 6-14).
- We grow by faith in Christ and not by performance (v. 11).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following question here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.

- Who appears in this passage?

- Where is this passage taking place?

- When is this passage occurring?

- Why is this passage important?

- What is happening in this passage?

- How does this passage apply to my life?

- What stood out to you most from this lesson?

- How would you describe the difference between believing in God and believing God? Did you have a point in time when you went from simply believing in God's existence to truly believing in Him? What happened?

- How do you think living by the Law is a curse? In contrast, how is living by the Spirit a blessing?



Using My *Fire Bible*®

Read the study notes for the following verses ,articles, and charts in the Fire Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- **Galatians 3:2** What happens if a person relies on regulations in order to please God? How many times from this verse forward does Paul refer to the Holy Spirit?
- **Galatians 3:5** What do the references to the Spirit include? For Paul, what else besides individual, inward work did he see as a result of the Holy Spirit's work?
- **Galatians 3:10** Describe in your own words what “under a curse” means.
- **Galatians 3:11** What did Paul believe justification by faith involved?
- **Galatians 3:13** Describe in your own words Christ's redemption from the curse.

- Look in your *Fire Bible* index for the article titled “Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ” and answer the following:
 - » Read through two prophecies listed in this article each day until complete. In the space below or in your journal, write down your thoughts from your daily readings.

- Look in your *Fire Bible* index for the article titled “Regeneration and Spiritual Birth and Renewal” and answer the following:
 - » Describe in your own words the word *regeneration*.

 - » In your own words, describe what spiritual birth involves.

 - » When does spiritual birth happen and how is spiritual renewal ongoing?

 - » Why is spiritual birth necessary?

 - » How does a believer remain in a right personal relationship with God?

 - » What can you know about a person who claims to be born again but practices the sinful ways of the world?

 - » Describe in your own words how a person who has been born again can lose their relationship with God.

 - » List some results of spiritual birth and regeneration.

- Look in your *Fire Bible* index for the chart titled “The Work of the Holy Spirit” and answer the following:
 - » Read one section a week for five weeks. After you have read the tasks and corresponding references, write down what you learn from each section.