

Galatians 3:1-14 – Begun by the Spirit, Completed by the Flesh?
Community Group Galatians Lesson 5

I. Review

When you add behavioral requirements to the gospel for the sake of pleasing men, you leave the gospel of grace. **Galatians 1**

- A. Paul is sent by the Lord to the Galatian churches to correct them from deception by men who teach a false gospel which exists to please men (1:1-10)
- B. The gospel he received directly from Christ is the one they are dismissing (1:11-24)
- C. The gospel he gave was confirmed by the Jerusalem apostles (2:1-10)
- D. The gospel he gave was accurate enough to even correct the apostles (2:11-21)

II. Faith in Christ is the *Only* Means of Righteousness

Gal. 3:1-14

A. Preview

You cannot gain God's favor by trying hard to fulfill the law

Gal. 3:1-14

- 1. Will you perfect by the law that which was begun by the Spirit? (3:1-5)
- 2. The good news of a redeeming God has always been by faith (3:6-9)
- 3. The law has never redeemed man (3:10-14)

B. Five Questions of Rebuke

Gal. 3:1-5

- 1. You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? **(3:1)**
 - a. Foolish! (More literally, *without a mind!*) Not the “foolish” word meaning ‘godless.’ Idea is, “Are you not using your minds?” (*Don’t you know better?*)
 - b. Who has *bewitched* you? (It must have taken magic to trick you!) Word often conveys the use of “the evil eye” – manipulative, intimidating deception.
 - c. Christ was *publicly portrayed* to you as crucified. (i.e., *Was that not enough?*) You didn’t just hear what Christ did for you – you saw it represented. Unusual word. Remember, this was an *auditory* society. The word means that it was written in public and displayed like a poster or like Power Point Slides. It is like what John says in 1 John 1: Growing intimacy with God can be described as that which is *heard, seen and held*. In this verse Paul accentuates the fact that Christ’s death and resurrection was not an idea or philosophy. It was an historical event that they came as close to *seeing* as was possible. Similar to how some people hear about Christ and believe, but sometimes their faith is weak, and others talk about what God has done among them – they’ve seen Him at work and faith is strengthened. Reminds us of Thomas, “unless I see, I will not believe.” Paul is saying, “you as good as saw the resurrected Christ!”

2. **Were you saved (“received Spirit”) by works of law or hearing with faith? (3:2)**
- Paul wants not only to teach, but to engage their spiritual minds. So he starts with, *This is all I want to know from you* – it invites the hearer to think.
 - Did you receive the Spirit....* Notice, he would not say that to a non-believer. He is writing to Christians, but Christians who have left the gospel of grace. This reminds us that is possible. It also reinforces that spiritual birth is from above.
 - Also, see how Paul affirms that all believers have received the Holy Spirit. Some churches teach that receiving the Holy Spirit is separate from trusting Christ. But as we see in Romans 8:9, anyone without the Spirit does not belong to Christ, because everyone who has believed the gospel receives the Spirit.
 - By the way, this invites all of us to recount when we believed the gospel. Did you “receive the Spirit” by faith or by works of the law? When you became a Christian, do you recall whether it was you receiving a gift by faith or it was you pledging to do something to please God? If it was the latter, that is not biblical faith.
3. **Are you so foolish? Begun in the Spirit, will you be completed by the law? (3:3)**
- Paul again addresses the mindlessness of leaving the gospel of grace. **Foolish!**
 - He already knew the answer to the question he asked in verse 2 – *begun by the Spirit*. He wanted to remind them to ask themselves the question, to think about the fact that they, like all Christians, begin their relationship with God by faith in Christ, responding to the gift freely offered to all who believe.
 - This is the central argument of chapter 3, and in reality, of the whole book. Paul challenges them to realize that it is mindless, illogical, inconsistent – to think that people please God by believing a free gift is offered to them in Christ which they receive by faith, and then are “completed” by what they add to it.
 - “Completed” is from a Greek word, *teleos*, that can be translated either *perfect* or *complete*. It means, “that for which a thing is designed.” It is like what happens when you see something or someone come into maturity. If you see a horse foaled, it appears initially as ungainly, spindly and uncoordinated. But if you see that horse as a two-year old, running through hills and fields, mane and tail flying, that is the “teleos” of a horse. That is what was designed for.

Paul is asking the Galatian believers, *do you think that the Christian life which was begun by receiving a gift by faith in the risen Lord Jesus, is going to be brought to maturity by leaving that gift-based relationship in the past and pressing on to live by the works of the law? “That is completely foolish!”*

4. **Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain? (3:4)**
- Here Paul refers to the costs incurred by the churches of Galatia when they first believed. He knows – because he was with them – that they underwent persecution from Jews and Gentiles because they believed on Jesus.

In Pisidian Antioch, we read in Acts 13:30 that the Jews instigated people of prominence to persecute Paul and Barnabbas who were proclaiming Christ, and that may have spilled over on new believers. And in Iconium in chapter 14:2, we read that Jews incited other Jews and Gentiles to persecute anyone now believing on Christ. That is the suffering he is referring to. He now asks, if you are adding works of the law to your faith alone in Christ alone, doesn't that imply that the gospel by which you were saved was insufficient by itself? So you suffered for no reason?

5. **So does He provide the Spirit and work miracles by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3:5)**

Again Paul asks a rhetorical question. *Are the good things God has done in you and among you the result of you believing Him or the result of you working hard to obey the law?* They would say that the Spirit in them and great things among them (Acts 14:3, 8-10) resulted from having believed, not from having obeyed a set of rules.

C. **Justification with God was always by faith – even with Abraham. (Gal. 3:6-9)**

Paul reminds the Galatians who have allowed themselves to be deluded that they were not living by the law enough that the Father of the Faith – Abraham – was justified by faith before there even was a law (Gen. 15:6). He then adds that those who are of faith are the true sons of Abraham.

1. Abraham believed God and it was accounted as righteousness. (3:6)
This is the strongest statement in the whole OT that justification with God (being declared righteous) was always by faith – even with Abraham. (See Romans 4:1-5)
2. Those who are true children of Abraham are those who have faith in the provision of God. For Abraham, it was him trusting God's promises for the people and land. For NT believers, it was trusting Jesus' offer of eternal life made possible by dying to pay for their sins and being raised from the dead for their justification. (3:7)
3. The scriptures always foresaw justification by faith. In Genesis 12:3, God promised that the nations would be blessed through Abraham. And now Paul applies the promise of blessing for the nations to those who believe on Christ. (3:8-9)

D. **Trusting in your obedience to laws places you under a curse, while trusting in God's provision alone is a place of blessing and justification before God. (Gal. 3:10-14)**

1. *For as many are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the law, to perform them."* Whoever "places themselves under the law" (i.e., attempting successful following of laws) is under a curse, since the law demands complete obedience without failure and that has already been proven to be impossible with man (Deut. 27:26). (3:10)
2. *No that no one is justified by the law before God is evident, for, "the righteous man shall live by faith." The Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "he who practices them (the deeds of the law) shall live by them."* (3:11-12)

Here Paul restates that not only is justification only by faith, and not only is anyone who wants to be under the law cursed, but he wants to restate that no one can be justified in front of God by deeds of the law. His explanation? “The righteous man shall live by faith.” With the same quote that resulted in Martin Luther believing the gospel for the first time, Paul wishes to make it plain that a sinful man can only be declared righteous through the exercise of faith in another righteous One.

3. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law... (cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.* (3:13-14)
 - a. We were under the law’s curse, so Jesus had to become a curse for us (v. 13)
 - b. So that the blessing of Abraham (declared righteous by God) might come to Gentiles also – through faith (v. 14)

4. Summary

To supplement Christ’s sufficient work by conforming to the law is to supplant the gospel.

Dr. Don Campbell’s commentary on Galatians (from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*):
*In the first two chapters of the epistle, Paul established the divine origin of his apostleship and his message. Then he turned to the Galatians who were being urged to add works to faith, to keep the Mosaic Law in addition to placing faith in Christ, as the grounds of acceptance before God. The Judaizers believed the Galatian Christians would receive a more complete salvation and a greater sanctification if they obeyed the Law. But Paul argued that to supplement the work of Christ is to supplant it. **There can only be one way of salvation, and that is by faith in Christ alone.***

5. Discussion

- A. One or two of you summarize briefly the main point of 3:1-14.
- B. Have you ever questioned your salvation because of something you did or didn’t do?
- C. Why does Paul say the believers “are foolish” and “must have been bewitched” to want to return to the law as a means of maintaining the favor of God?
- D. If you know you are not measuring up to God’ standards but you know you have believed, how can you use the gospel and God’s grace to encourage you?

6. Homework

- A. Read Galatians 1-6 this week, one chapter per day
- B. Take one verse from the first three chapters and teach it to someone.
- C. Discuss this question at a meal this week:

There is a place to exhort believers to obey the laws that God has established (see Ephesians 4:1 and Romans 12:1). But there is also a place to remind them that the Holy Spirit uses the grace that saved them to enable them to live lives that please God (Galatians 3:1-14). How do you determine which one to use?