Note: This study includes 3 Discussion Questions

Galatians Chapter 3

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Introduction:

1. While writing to the Church at Rome, Paul had admonished the members to accept one another.

> **Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.** (Romans 14:1 NLT)

The issues were about what to eat or not to eat and what days to observe or not to observe.

2. Here in Galatians, Paul demands the Christians to break off with the Judaizers because their views are a direct blow to the very foundational truth of being right with God.

3. In chapter 2, Paul has finished with the hypocrisy of Peter. Now he turns his big guns on the Galatians. It is vivid.

(3:1) Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of His death on the cross.

- Paul calls the **Galatians foolish** and repeats the charge in verse 3. They are people of bad judgment. The Greek word is "understanding" with a "no" before it. **W.E. Vine** says "senseless." It wasn't complimentary. The *J.B Phillips New Testament* reads:

> **O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly . . .**

- The **Galatians** were behaving as though an **evil spell** had been cast on them and they were no longer in control of their decisions.

- Paul had painted a word **picture** of the **death of Jesus** and especially its **meaning**. It's as though someone had taken a photo of **His death** on their cell phone and conveyed the **picture** to these **Galatians**.

(2) Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.

- They had the **Holy Spirit**. Did they **receive** Him from the **Law of Moses?** The answer is they **received the Spirit when they believed the message of Christ.** Peter's listeners on the Day of Pentecost believed what he said about Jesus and they received the Holy Spirit when they demonstrated their faith by being baptized to identify with the death and resurrection of Christ.

> **Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** (Acts 2:37-38 NLT)

(3) How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

- Again -- the charge of being **foolish. The Spirit** is where every one of us gets the power to win.

> **I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit.** (Ephesians 3:16 NLT)

Without **the Spirit,** we're on our own against a very powerful adversary -- the devil. If they could not *obtain salvation* by

Q1: What does it look like when we slip out of a relationship built on faith and into a "performance-based" relationship with God?

keeping the law, could they *expect to grow* in holiness or Christian maturity by the law? Q1 - See above...

(4) Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

- The Galatians had struggled and been persecuted, but the Spirit had strengthen them for the battles. Are they going to waste the victories of the past by returning to merely human efforts instead of working by the Spirit?

(5) I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

- Luke documents a miracle among the Galatians in Acts:

> **While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. He was sitting and listening as Paul preached. Looking straight at him, Paul realized he had faith to be healed. So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.** (Acts 14:8-10 NLT)

- The question in verse 5 is so powerful that Paul restates it. The answer forces the Galatians to acknowledge that what they **believed** at the beginning was correct and that their change to keeping **the law** was just that -- a change. They were saved by **believing in Christ**, not **obeying the law**.

(6) In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."

- Paul quotes directly from Genesis:

> **And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.**
> (Genesis 15:6 NLT)

Not from keeping some system of law but by **faith**. There were laws to keep, but he was **counted as righteous** because of **his faith**.

(7) The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

- This creates a new line of descendants from **Abraham:** not Jewish people, but people who had **faith** like **Abraham.** These are **Abraham's real children.**

(8) What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when He said, "All nations will be blessed through you."

- Not only was Abraham made righteous because of *his faith,* but the event itself was a prophecy that **Gentiles** would be **declared righteous** because of ***their faith***. Abraham received the prophecy when God spoke:

> **I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:3 NLT)

(9) So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

- Anyone, including Gentiles, **who puts their faith in Christ** receives the **same blessings that Abraham received.**

(10) But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under His curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law."

- By contrast, anyone who depends on the Law to make themselves right with God faces this truth from Scriptures:

> **'Cursed is anyone who does not affirm and obey the terms of these instructions.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen.'** (Deuteronomy 27:26 NLT)

- Missing from this formula is a solution for the personal sin problem. **The law** does not contain such a solution.

(11) So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

- Now Paul quotes from the Prophet Habakkuk:

> **"Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.** (Habakkuk 2:4 NLT)

The Galatians had been convinced by the Judaizers that it was necessary to **keep the law**. It can't work. **Faith** is the mechanism that **God** has specified.

(12) This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life."

> **If you obey My decrees and My regulations, you will find life through them. I am the LORD.**
> (Leviticus 18:5 NLT)

There is **life** in **the law** for those who keep it flawlessly. One failure, and **life** is removed. Only one Person ever kept it perfectly and that is Jesus of Nazareth. That's why He could rescue us, as seen in the next verse.

(13) But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When He was hung on the cross, He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

Q2: What are some modern cultural codes or unspoken church expectations that place a "curse" of inadequacy or exclusion on us today?

> **. . . the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession.** (Deuteronomy 21:23 NLT)

- Only Jesus could take the **curse** for our wrongdoing. It was at this time that God's penalty for our sin was paid and it was a member of the Godhead Who paid it. That one life was more valuable that all of humanity combined.

(14) Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing He promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.

- It was through **Christ** that **Gentiles** were included with the offspring of **Abraham** to receive the **Holy Spirit** and this was all through **faith**. Obedience to the law was not even considered.

Q2: See question 2 above...

(15) Dear brothers and sisters, here's an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case.

- In everyday life, an **irrevocable agreement** can't be changed or dismissed. Permanent means permanent.

(16) God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children, " as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to His child" -- and that, of course, means Christ.

- Paul makes an argument with problems attached because the translators see the word as **plural** in Genesis 13:15.

> **I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession.** (Genesis 13:15 NLT)

But Paul is right. The word translated as *descendants* is actually singular, both in Hebrew and the later Greek. The word is "seed" or "spermata." So buried here is a truth that is not easy to see, but valid. **Abraham** saw it. Hear Jesus:

> **Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to My coming. He saw it and was glad."** (John 8:56 NLT)

The **promises** of God to **Abraham** narrowed through the centuries. The **promises** passed to Isaac and bypassed Ismael. The **promises** passed to Jacob and bypassed Esau. Jacob focused on Judah in Genesis 49:10. King David was from the line of Judah and a permanent king was **promised** to him. The angel Gabriel told Mary of Nazareth that Jesus would be that permanent king. Luke 1:32-33. He is Christ. **Abraham** saw this. So Paul is right.

(17) This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking His promise.

- This promise of being right with **God** by faith was not **canceled** when the **law of Moses** arrived. **God's promise** was not just until the **law** was given.

(18) For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.

- **The inheritance promise** is raised. The Hebrew writer also brings it up in Hebrews 6:12-15.
- This wonderful **promise** from **God** was totally unearned. It was by **grace**.

(19) Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to

last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave His law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people.

- Now we learn **why** the **law was given**. It was placed along side of the promise **God** made to Abraham of a special **child** that was to come. Abraham understood that **promise.** But the **law** was designed to last only until the coming of the **child.** It was not intended to be for all time. Other translations are useful here:

  (ASV) **What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator.**

  (KJV) **Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.**

- The purpose of the law is to identify sin. It has no way to undo the guilt of sin. **The law** was given to **Moses** and he became a **mediator between** God and the people.
- ". . . **designed to last only until the coming of the child . . . "** Such a revelation! The **law of Moses was designed to last** only until the "Seed" of Abraham came. Abraham himself took the promise of a **coming** Seed quite literally and we know that it was Jesus Christ. John 8:56. The Galatians missed or ignored this and were placing themselves under **the Law** again by listening to the Judaizers. The **law** of **Moses** was given through **angels** but **the promise** to Abraham of a coming Seed was directly from **God.**

  Jesus stated clearly that the law was phasing out in God's plans by His coming:

> **"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.**
> (Matthew 5:17 NLT)

(20) Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when He gave His promise to Abraham.

- Even the word **mediator** implies two parties who are not in agreement. But there was no **mediator** between **God** and **Abraham.** Nothing was being negotiated. This was a clear **promise** from **God to Abraham.**

(21) Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it.

- Is there a **conflict between God's law** and **God's promises** through Abraham? No. **The law** has no way to **give us new life** like the promises made to Abraham can.

(22) But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

- **Scriptures declare:**

> **Don't put Your servant on trial, for no one is innocent before You.** (Psalms 143:2 NLT)

- **David Guzik** says:
  Paul paints a picture of imprisonment. The bars of the cell are sin, keeping us confined. The Scripture put us in the prison, because it pointed out our sinful condition.
  So we sit imprisoned by sin, and the law can not help us, because the law put us in the prison!
- There is no escape from the prison of **sin** through trying to keep the **law**. **Freedom** comes **only by believing in Jesus Christ.**

(23) Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. (24) Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith.

- **The Law** did have a purpose: it kept Jews like Paul under guard until the **way of faith was revealed.** It had no power to make anyone right with **God**, but it delivered them to the message of Jesus that did have the power to make men and women **right with God through faith**.

(25) And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian. (26) For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- Now things are different. We can live fully identified with **Jesus Christ**, so the **guardian of the law** is no longer needed. Instead, we are **children of God** and free because of **faith in Christ Jesus.**

(27) And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.

- We each become united with **Christ** by **baptism**. It's like putting on new clothes. When God looks at believers, He sees **Christ.**
- Abraham was a man of faith, but the Lord tested him:

> **Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." "Take your son, your only son -- yes, Isaac, whom you love so much -- and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."** (Genesis 22:1-2 NLT)

- So **baptism** becomes a testing. Faith isn't determined just by our claim to faith, but are we willing to identify with Jesus in His

death and resurrection as pictured in **baptism**? That is how we unite with **Christ**. That's how we **put on Christ**. Just as no one identified Abraham's obedience as *good work*, neither do New Testament writers identify baptism as a *work*. In the light of being tested, Peter makes perfect sense when he says:

> **And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** (1 Peter 3:21 NLT)

Baptism saves when it is a demonstration of our faith in Christ Jesus.



(28)

(28)

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Paul says that previous social distinctions don't count because all believers are made **one in Christ**. There is no ethnicity in Christ.

(29) And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

- In the process, believers are identified as the **true children of Abraham.** Believers, whether Jew or Gentiles, are Abraham's **heirs** and own **God's promise to Abraham**.

Q3: Why is it so tempting to find our security in earthly labels (like politics, career, or background) rather than our shared identity as children of God?