

GALATIANS CHAPTER 3

Justification by Faith (vs. 1-9)

After discussing with the Galatians his experience in Jerusalem over the conflict regarding circumcision in the previous two chapters, Paul turned his attention directly to the issue in the Galatian churches. He reminded them of their own conversions and called them back to those experiences. Paul uses six (6) different arguments to prove that God saves sinners through faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. He begins with the *personal argument (Gal. 3:1-5)* in which he asks the Galatians to recall their personal experience with Christ when they were saved. Then he moves into the *scriptural argument (Gal. 3:6-14)*, in which he quotes six Old Testament passages to prove his point. In the *logical argument (Gal. 3:15-29)* he reasons with his readers on the basis of what a covenant is and how a covenant works. He then presents the *historical argument (Gal. 4:1-11)* explaining the place of Law in the history of Israel. At this point, Paul's love for his converts comes to the surface. The result is a *sentimental argument (Gal. 4:12-18)* as the apostle appeals to them to remember his love and their happy relationship in days past. But then Paul goes right back to his close reasoning, and concludes with the *allegorical argument (Gal. 4:19-31)*, based on the life of Abraham and his relationships with Sarah and Hagar. Practical application of his doctrinal argument follows in the last two chapters.

Vs. 1 – In calling the Galatians *foolish*, Paul did not mean they were morally or mentally deficient (the ancient Greek word *moros* whereby we get our English word *moron* is not the word for foolish used here. Instead, Paul used the ancient Greek word *anoetos*, which had the idea of someone who can think but fails to use their power of perception. The word *foolish* does not indicate lack of intelligence but lack of wisdom and a lack of obedience (*in other words to know better but not to do better*). Now the word *bewitched* means charmed

or misled by flattery and fake promises. Bewitched has the idea that the Galatians were under some type of spell. Paul didn't mean this *literally*, but their thinking was so clouded – and so unbiblical – that it seemed that some kind of spell had been cast over them. (To me this is happening today with the health, wealth, prosperity gospel – so called unrepentant homosexual Christians/pastors who endorse and officiate same sex weddings; and those who now espouse there is more than one way unto heaven besides Jesus. Magic was common in Paul's day (*Acts 8:9-11; 13:6, 7*). Magicians used both optical illusions and Satan's power to perform miracles, and people were drawn into the magicians' mysterious rites without recognizing their dangerous source. The phrase *“Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified”*- The idea is to publicly display as in setting on a billboard. Paul wondered how the Galatians could have missed the message because he certainly made it clear enough to them.

Vs. 2-3 - Obviously, the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through simple faith. The Holy Spirit is not a prize earned through the works of the law. In *vs. 2* Paul contrasts obedience of the Law with faith. The hearing of faith is most likely what Paul meant in *Romans 10:17* which says, *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* It is very important that we understand the importance the Holy Spirit plays in Paul's defense of the

gospel of the grace of God. The only real evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer ([Romans 8:9](#)). The Holy Spirit convicts the lost sinner and reveals Jesus to him ([John 16:7-11](#)). The sinner can *resist the Spirit* ([Acts 7:51](#)) or *yield to the Holy Spirit* and trust Jesus Christ. When the sinner believes in Christ, he is then *born of the Spirit* ([John 3:1-8](#)) and receives new life. He is also *baptized* by the Spirit so that he becomes a part of the spiritual body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:12-14](#)). The believer is *sealed* by the Spirit ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)) as a *guarantee* that he will one day share in the glory of Christ. Since the Holy Spirit does so much for the believer, this means that the *believer has a responsibility* to the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)). The Christian should walk in the Spirit ([Gal. 5:16, 25](#)) by reading the word, praying, and obeying God's will. If he disobeys God, then he is *grieving the Spirit* ([Ephesians 4:30](#)), and if he persists in doing this, he may *quench the spirit* ([1 Thess. 5:19](#)). This does not mean that the Holy Spirit will leave him, because Jesus has promised that the Spirit abides forever ([John 14:16](#)). But it does mean that the Spirit cannot give him the joy and power that he needs for daily Christian living. Believers should be filled with the Spirit ([Ephesians 5:18-21](#)), which simply means "*controlled by the Spirit.*" This is a continuous experience, like drinking water from a fresh stream ([John 7:37-39](#)). So in their conversion experience, the believers in

Galatia had received the Spirit by faith and not by the works of the Law. This leads to another question: *If you did not begin with the Law, why bring the law into the equation?* If you begin with the Spirit, can you go to maturity without the Spirit depending on the flesh? “*Flesh*” here does not mean human body but *old sin nature*.

Vs. 4 – Regarding the question have you suffered so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain?” Apparently, the Galatians had (perhaps when Paul was among them) suffered for the principle of faith (probably at the hands of legalistic Christians) even before they were tricked by the false gospel. So would their departure from the principle of faith mean that this past suffering was in vain? We know that Paul did suffer persecution in this region. **Acts 14** makes it clear that Paul and his companions were persecuted vigorously (Paul even being stoned and left for dead) by the Jews when they were among the cities of Galatia. Surely some of this persecution spilled over to the Christian congregations Paul left behind in Galatia. **Isaiah 55:11** says, “*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*” So even if we have to deal with temporary persecution God’s word will accomplish what it was sent out to do and nobody can bless you like Jesus for being obedient to His word.

Vs. 5 – Now the Galatians knew that they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not when they obeyed the law. *Today people still feel insecure in their faith because faith alone seems too easy.* Confessing and repenting seems too easy. People still try to get closer to God by following rules and doing work. Work has its place (*Ephesians 2:10*) and obedience has its place (**John 14:15**) – *if you love Me, keep my commandments*) both play a significant role in the life of a believer **AFTER** we are saved. *But we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus plus or minus nothing.* In this verse Paul is trying to get the Galatians to focus again on Christ as the foundation of their faith. The Galatians also seemed to want to live in a state of perpetual excitement. Often times the Holy Spirit does His greatest work in a believer in teaching us to persist, to keep on doing what is right even when it no longer seems interesting or exciting (this verse ministered to me so much as I see the *sagging attendance of S.H.O.P. and Wednesday Evening Bible study...when something is no longer new in the church, many turn it off.* In **vs. 5** the Galatians quickly turned from Paul’s Good News to the teachings of the newest teachers/doctrine in town...remember the buzz around “*Praying the Prayer of Jabez*” and the conferences that surrounded it especially after the book came out. (read 1 Chronicles 4:10) – the increase Jabez was primarily referring to was an increase in favor for kingdom advancement and then he had the good

sense to ask God to keep evil from him...literally in Hebrew he said, “keep me from me”...once God granted him the favor; he did not want the increase to cause him to sin. If the Christian life seems ordinary and boring, you may need the Holy Spirit to stir up the gift inside of you (*2 Timothy 1:6*). When Paul said, “*Does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*” Well, God supplied the Holy Spirit in response to faith. Miracles are wrought by faith. Yet the Galatians were deceived into thinking that real spiritual riches lay in pursuing God through a works relationship. Paul wanted the Galatians to make a choice will it be: do you believe you will be blessed by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Will you earn and deserve your blessing from God, or will you believe and receive it?

Vs. 6 – (Paul is quoting from *Genesis 15:6* – even in the O.T. salvation is by faith in God). When the text says “*Just as Abraham*”- among the Galatian Christians, the push towards a works-based relationship with God came from those who were born as Jews and claimed Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. Therefore, Paul used Abraham as an example of being right before God by faith and not by faith plus works. *Righteousness was accounted to Abraham because he believed God.* It was not because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

Vs. 7 – Even if one is not a Jew if they have faith in Jesus they are apart of God’s people. The Jewish people by God’s sovereign choosing were to be the people who led all other people to God (God the Father in O.T.) and to Jesus (God the Son in N.T). Read ***Ephesians 3:2-6***. Regarding the phrase *”only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham”* - since Abraham was made righteous by faith and not by works, Abraham was therefore the father of everyone who believes God and is accounted righteous. The phrase *are sons of Abraham* - was a strong rebuke to the Jewish Christians who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the law. They believed they were superior because they descended from Abraham and observed the law. Paul said that the most important link to Abraham was not the link of genetics and not the link of works, *but it is the link of faith.*

Vs. 8-9 – The phrase *”and the Scripture”* reflects what Bible study and preaching should always be...exposition of the Scriptures, not just cute stories. This shows just how strongly Paul regarded the Bible as God’s word.

Human words cannot change human hearts; only God’s word can change human hearts. Paul believed that when the Scriptures spoke, God spoke. The phrase *”foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith”* - Paul observed that even back in Abraham’s day it was clear that this blessing of righteousness by faith was intended for every nation, for Gentiles as well as

Jews, because God pronounced that in you all the nations shall be blessed (*read Genesis 12:3*). Paul is trying to destroy the idea that a Gentile must first become a Jew before they could become a Christian. If that were necessary God would never have said this blessing would extend to every nation, because Gentiles would have had to become part of the Israelite nation to be saved.

Vs. 9 – now because Abraham was rich, the blessing we receive with believing Abraham is not necessarily the blessing of fantastic wealth and power, because Abraham was extremely wealthy and powerful. The blessing is something far more precious: the blessing of a right standing with God through faith. What we have awaiting us our eyes have not seen; ears have not heard; nor has it entered into the heart of man according to *1 Corinthians 2:9*.

Vs. 10-12 – In these verses, Paul returned to the concept of living under the authority of the Old Testament law. Paul once again strongly and directly attacked the Judaizers' claims. He contrasted those living under the law with those under the faith by referencing Scripture (*read Deuteronomy 27:26 – Habakkuk 2:4*). Since Deuteronomy 27:26 says those who do not keep the whole law are cursed then all would be cursed since no one can keep the whole law in and of themselves. And this is why Paul also quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to demonstrate *a person can only be justified through faith*. Paul demonstrated that these two passages, which were the most likely used by the Judaizers,

only mention the law in relationship to a curse. By contrast, where faith is mentioned so is righteousness. In other words, faith in Jesus as the Messiah lifted the curse of the law and extended Abraham's blessing to the Gentiles and gave the Holy Spirit to the Galatians. Thus, vs. 10 and vs. 12 parallel each other and vs. 11 stands between them as a contrast. *Read Romans 5:8*

Vs. 13-14 – In these verses Paul is highlighting Jesus *redeems us from the curse of the law*. Because we could not keep the whole law or be obedient fully to all of the law, the law would have put us under a curse (*remember this is what happened to Adam and Eve when they disobeyed in the Garden of Eden*). But Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law in what He did on the Cross (*2 Corinthians 5:21*) - *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*. Redeemed has the idea of “buying back” or “purchasing out of.” It isn't just rescuing; it is paying a price to rescue so that one will never be purchased again. Jesus bought us out from under the curse of the law. What is the “promise” Paul is referring to: *Genesis 12:1-3 and Romans 4:16-17*. The full extent of the promise is realized in *Ephesians 3:1-7*.

The Changeless Promise (vs. 15-18)

Vs. 15-16 – The word *promise* is used 8 times in *verses 15-18*, referring to God’s promise to Abraham that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed (*Genesis 12:1-3 and Ephesians 3:1-7*). And then in **Genesis 22:18** - God promised Abraham that in your Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Paul observes that the singular for *Seed* is used, not the plural. The point is clear: “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. God is referring to one specific descendant of Abraham, not all his descendants in general. Paul then begins to discuss the intent of the law. He illustrated by suggesting that even among human beings, once a covenant was established, it was considered a binding agreement, and new conditions could not be added. Paul’s declaration was important because of his statement in **vs. 16**. He argued that the promises God made were to Abraham and “his Seed.” He interpreted this to mean the “Seed” that God referred to with Abraham was Jesus Christ. The “Seed” goes back to **Genesis 3:15 after the fall of man**. In the final analysis God made this covenant of promise with Abraham through Christ, so that the only two parties who can make any changes are God the Father and God the Son. In the Abrahamic Covenant God made promises to Abraham but Abraham made no promise to God; Abraham did not make a covenant with God; God made the covenant with Abraham; it was a covenant of grace.

Vs. 17-18 – Having established the historical foundation, Paul came to his major purpose. As covenants made by people are binding and cannot be voided by additions, even more so are covenants made between God and humanity. Paul argued that God’s promise to Abraham pre-dated that of the Mosiac Law by hundreds of years and was not invalidated by it. In **vs. 18** the phrase *“For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise”* - If the inheritance offered to Abraham was on the **basis of law**, it might not be permanent – because it would depend, at least in part, on Abraham’s keeping of the law. But since the inheritance was offered on the **basis of promise** - God’s promise, then it stands sure. And then the phrase *“God gave it to Abraham by promise”* The word **gave** in **vs. 18** is based on the Greek word **charis** – grace. God’s giving to Abraham was the *free giving of grace*. The word is also in the perfect tense, showing that the gift is permanent. Judaizers might quote Moses; but Paul will quote Abraham. Let them quote law; he will quote promise. If they appeal to the centuries of tradition and the proud history of the law of Moses, he will appeal to the grander ‘covenant with Abraham’, older by centuries still.”

Purpose of the Law (vs. 19-25)

Vs. 19-20 – Paul asks a question and then immediately answers it. God had to give us His standard so we would not destroy ourselves before the Messiah

came. But the law is also added because of transgressions in another way; the law also excites man's innate rebellion through revealing a standard, showing us more clearly our need for salvation in Jesus (*Romans 7:5-8*). The phrase "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" The Law was meant to prepare us for the work of the Messiah, it was given till the Seed (Jesus) should come (*Genesis 3:15*). It isn't that the Law of Moses is revoked when Jesus came (Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it in (*Matthew 5:17*); instead, the Law of Moses is no longer our ground of approaching God. The phrase "it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator" according to ancient traditions, the Law was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai by the hands of angels. Angels were the "go-between" or mediator for Moses when he received the Law from God. When God gave the Law to Israel He did it by means of angels and through the mediation of Moses. Israel received the Law by the disposition of angels as stated in *Acts 7:52-53*. This means that the nation received the Law 3rd hand - from God to angels to Moses. But when God made a covenant with Abraham, He did it personally, without a mediator. God was revealing to Abraham all that He would do for him and his descendants. *A mediator stands between two parties and helps them to agree*; but there was no need for a mediator in Abraham's case since God was entering into a covenant with him, not Abraham with God.

Now God did speak with Moses one on one. Salvation in Jesus by faith is received by a promise. *This is a very difficult verse to interpret.* *The general thought seems to be that the promise must be considered superior to the law because the law is one-sided. The law was mediated, and this means that man was a party to it. The promise, on the other hand, is unilateral; man is not a party to it.”*

Vs. 21-22 – The relationship of the law and the promises of God is not in competition...just like with leadership in the church. *Church leaders should not operate in competition but in cooperation with one another.* The Law was not given by God to give eternal life and righteousness. Rather the law was to show why we need a savior...the law points to faith in God and that accounts for our righteousness (a right standing with Jesus). Regarding the phrase “*the Scripture has confined all under sin,*” in **vs. 22** Paul paints a picture of imprisonment. The bars of the cell are sin, keeping us confined. The Law put us in the prison, because it pointed out our sinful condition. So we sit imprisoned by sin, and the law cannot help us, because the law put us in the prison. So man before Jesus delivered us on the Cross was imprisoned by past mistakes; beaten down by sin; and choked by desires we know are wrong. God knew we were sin’s prisoners but He had a way of escape planned before the foundation of the earth – Jesus dying on the Cross in our place since He

was sinless would satisfy God's justice for sin. Regarding the phrase "given to those who believe" - only *faith* can break us out of our confinement to sin. There is no chance of a jailbreak. Instead, an offer is made by the warden Himself to simply open the door and let us walk out. But you have to acknowledge you are confined, that you deserve to be in the cell, and ask the warden (Jesus in this illustration) to free you. When the prosecutor accuses the warden of not being just, the warden simply points out that the freed prisoner's sentence was completely fulfilled – by Himself! Paid in full on the Cross by the sacrificial and atoning blood of Jesus.

Vs. 23-25 – Paul tells us in vs. 23-25 the *Law of Moses* is our tutor, a guardian to bring us to Jesus. Before faith came; before we were saved by faith; before we lived our lives by faith, we were kept under guard by the law. Here, Paul uses a different word and a different idea than when he wrote the Law has confined all under sin in the previous verse. The idea behind confined is *imprisonment*; the idea behind under guard is *protective custody*. There is a sense in which we were imprisoned by our own sin under the law; but there is also another sense in which it guarded us in protective custody. So how does the law protect us? It protects us by showing us God's heart. It protects us by showing us the best way to live. It protects us by showing what should be approved and disapproved among men. It protects us by providing a foundation

for civil law. Regarding the phrase in **vs. 23** “kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed” - the Law of Moses prepared us to come to Jesus by the way it reveals God’s character and the way it exposed our sin. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. The purpose of the Law of Moses is fulfilled when we stop trying to justify ourselves and come to faith in Jesus. Regarding the phrase in **Vs. 25** – “but after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” once we have come to a saving relationship of faith, we no longer have to live under our tutor, though we remember the behavior he has taught us. So we respect our tutor, the Law; but we don’t live under him. We live under Jesus by faith. Also, the word tutor - Greek word paidagogos meant more than just to teach a child but it also meant being the child’s guardian, watching over the child and his behavior. And when the child has grown, he doesn’t do away with the discipline and lessons he gained from the tutor; but he also doesn’t live under the tutor any longer. This is our relation to the law of God. We learn from it; we remember our lessons from it, but we don’t live under the law.

Vs. 26-27 - By faith, we find our identity with Jesus Christ. Regarding the phrase “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” compared to what was being taught among the Galatians, this was a revolutionary statement. In traditional Jewish thinking (carried into Christianity by Jewish

Christians), your standing before God was measured by your obedience to the law. To truly be close to God – considered sons of God – you had to be extremely observant of the law, just as the Scribes and Pharisees were (*Matthew 23*). Here, Paul says we can be considered sons of God in a completely different way: *through faith in Christ Jesus*. And to be among the sons of God means we have a special relationship with God as a loving and caring Father. It is a place of closeness, a place of affection, a place of special care and attention. To become a son of God through faith in Christ Jesus means much more than believing that He exists or did certain things. It is to put our trust in Him, both for now and eternity. Regarding the phrase “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ,*” using the picture of baptism, Paul illustrates what it means to have faith in Christ Jesus. He doesn’t say we were baptized into water, but baptized into Christ. Just as in water baptism, a person is immersed in water, so when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, we are immersed in Jesus. Too many Christians seem to be content with just “dipping a bit” into Jesus. But God want us to be *fully immersed in Jesus*; not sprinkled, not just a part of us dipped. When a person is immersed in water, you don’t even see the person much anymore – you mostly see the water. When we live as baptized into Christ, you don’t see so much of “me” anymore; you mostly see Jesus. This is the baptism that really saves us: our

immersion into Jesus. If a person isn't baptized into Christ, he could be dunked a thousand times into water and it would make no eternal difference. *If a person has been baptized into Christ, then he should follow through and do what Jesus told him to do*: receive baptism as a demonstration of his commitment to Jesus. Finally the phrase in *vs. 27* "*Have put on Christ*" is another way of expressing our immersion in Jesus. In the original language, the phrase has the idea of putting on a suit of clothes. So we "clothe ourselves" with Jesus as our identity. How we dress can have an impact on how we appear to others. We also need to know how to dress appropriately for each occasion. Paul says to us, "Your appropriate clothing for each day is to put on Christ. People should see that you belong to Him by looking at your life. You should live with the awareness that you are adorned with Jesus." (*Read Colossians 3:12-15*).

Vs. 28-29 – These verses highlight our equal standing with others who come to God through faith and they reflect an amazing revolution. The whole problem among the Galatian Christians is that some wanted to still observe the dividing line between Jew and Greek. When Paul says, "*There is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" the dividing line between Jew and Greek is not the only dividing line erased. Regarding our standing before God in Jesus, every dividing line is erased.

Now that Jesus is our identity, that is more important than any prior identity we possessed. We are all one in Christ Jesus. There is nothing wrong per se with denominations, but instead of some of them being bridges to the Gospel being spread, they are becoming walls of the Gospel being spread from a collaborate respective. As long as the primary message is Jesus is God the Son, the 2nd member of the Holy Trinity and Jesus is the one and only way unto salvation; we should be able to come together under of the banner of spreading the Gospel regardless of denomination or being non-denominational. Sadly, some Christians still draw lines today. In most places in America 11am – 1pm is still a very segregated time in the church. Now Paul knew that there was still a difference between Jew and Greek, and his evangelistic approach might differ to each group (*1 Corinthians 9:19-21*). You still have to do your job (you might not be able to lead Bible study from the water cooler at break time but you can be a Bible in how you live). There are still different roles for males and females in the home and in the church (1 Timothy 2:1-15). *Ephesians 5:22-33*, though they are equal in standing before God. There are differences in role and in function, but none in standing before God through faith in Jesus. “When we say that Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they no longer create any barriers to fellowship.” *And many of God’s children lack a deep*

understanding of the Christian way, but that does not mean that they are not genuine Christian...remember the thief on the cross saved in the nick of time.

Being a Christian is being a believer, not having an intellectual answer to all the problems we meet as we live out our Christian lives.” Peter said something similar to Paul’s teaching that racial *and heritage line must be pulled down when we are in Christ* – *read Acts 10:34*. And in *vs. 29* – “*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed*” - since all Christians belong to Jesus the Messiah, all Christians are spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of God. This place of high privilege comes according to the promise, not according to law or works. We are connected with the long line of God’s people assembled throughout all the ages. Some Jewish Christians said to the Galatians that if they *submitted to the law and became circumcised*, they could enjoy the status of being Abraham’s seed. Paul points out that this status was already theirs through faith in Jesus. When Paul referred to Jesus as Christ, he emphasized Jesus’ role as the promised Messiah of the Jewish people – and of all the world, as Paul emphasized. If we are Christ’s, then...we find our place in eternity, because we are sons and daughters of God. We find our place in society, because we are brothers and sisters in the family of God. We find our place in history, because we are part of God’s plan of the ages, related spiritually to Abraham by our faith in Jesus. In the *Old Testament* we

have *preparation for Christ*; in the *Gospels* we have *the presentation of Christ*; and in *Acts – Revelation* we have *the appropriation of Christ*. The Christian life should take on new wonder and meaning as you realize all that you have in Christ. And all that we have is by *grace*; not be *the Law*.