

Galatians Chapter 3

Justification By Faith Proven By Experience - Galatians 3:1-5

We now come to the second section of Galatians which deals with the doctrine of justification by faith. The first part, chapters 1-2, dealt with Paul's defense of his apostolic authority. He had to do this in order to lend credence to his message. After all, if he was not an Apostle, why would anyone listen to him? The last part of Galatians, chapters 5-6, deal with the practical application of justification by faith in one's manner of life. In-between Paul's defense and the application of justification by faith is chapters 3-4 which deal with the doctrine of justification by faith. This is important, because all application is based on theology. We cannot know how we should act unless we know why we should act a certain way.

In this chapter Paul proves the doctrine of justification by faith two ways. First, he turns to the Galatian believer's experience with Christ, then, he turns to Scripture.

Our Experience With Christ - Galatians 3:1

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

The first argument in Paul's defense of justification by faith was the experience of the individual Galatian believer. Paul reminds them of what happened when they first heard the message of the gospel and responded in faith.

Paul incredulously asks the Galatians, "*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?*" The word for foolish, *anoetos*, does not refer to foolishness which is a result of a deficient ability to think, rather it is a foolishness which is the result of someone who doesn't think or won't think. In other words, Paul is accusing the Galatian believers of not using their brains. They have set aside their mental ability to reason in order to follow after the error taught by the Judaizers. Because of the Galatians refusal to think, they have been bewitched. This word, *baskaino*, was used to refer to those who did magic tricks, or sleight-of-hand. Because the Galatians believers did not think, they were duped by a slick sales job perpetrated by the Judaizers.

The fact that the Galatians believers were duped is made even more serious by Paul's description of Christ. The word for "publicly portrayed," *prographo*, was used to refer to the public posting of messages in the market places. Official notices were often communicated to the people by putting up placards or notices in the marketplace or some other public place for all to see and read. Christ was publicly put up as our sacrifice for sin in much the same way as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. "Crucified" is in the perfect tense, which is a past act with continuing results. Christ's crucifixion in the past has continuing present results to those who believe.

Our Experience With the Holy Spirit - Galatians 3:2-4

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

Paul now introduces the second person of the Trinity in forming his argument from experience. His rhetorical question, which demands a negative response, is “Since you began in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh?” The notion behind this is that when we believed and were born again the Holy Spirit did the divine work of regeneration in our lives. Are we so foolish now to think that the Holy Spirit needs our help in keeping us alive, or in producing spiritual maturity in our lives. Although it is true that we are called to obedience, our obedience is an “energized” obedience whereby the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment enables us to do that which is right. It is not that we decide in and of ourselves to obey God, rather it is the Holy Spirit working in us that enables us to do that which is right.

The major idea in these two verses that Paul is trying to communicate to the Galatian believers is that they need to go back and remember the time they came to faith in Christ. At that time they were born again and given the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Since all of that was accomplished merely because they believed, how can they now assist the Holy Spirit through their own effort. The implied answer, they cannot.

Our Experience With the Father - Galatians 3:5

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Paul finally brings the last person of the Trinity in on this discussion, namely the Father. According to Acts 1:4 and Luke 11:13 it is the Father who has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and minister to believers. The word for “ministereth” is *epichoregeo*, which means to abundantly and overwhelmingly supply. God’s provision of the Holy Spirit is not something doled out grudgingly or reluctantly, but is something which is given in abundance. This provision of God is the source of miracles, *dunamis*, which refers to the power of God to overcome the deadness of life without Christ. All of this is made available, not by law, but by faith. The power of God which was evidenced in the lives of the Galatian believers came solely by faith.

Justification By Faith Proven By the Scriptures - Galatians 3:6-14

As valid as experience is when it comes to justification, a more sure word is that of Scripture. This is what Peter meant in 2 Peter 1:19-21 where he writes, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Peter had just reminded his readers of his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, where he was an eyewitness of the glorified Christ. As valid as that experience was, he had even a greater witness to divine truth, that being the word of God. In the rest of chapter three, Paul turns to the word of God in order to support the doctrine of justification by faith. He first shows positively from the Old Testament that Abraham was justified by faith alone, and then negatively from the Old Testament proving that the law can only curse, not save. He then points to Christ as the one who has suffered the curse of the law for us so that we may be justified by faith.

Positively From The Old Testament - Galatians 3:6-9

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before

the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Positively, Paul points to Abraham as a model of justification by faith. The reason Paul chose Abraham is that it was universally accepted by the Jews of Paul's day that Abraham was justified by works. They argued that of all the men on earth, Abraham was the most righteous. Because of this, God chose Abraham. Note the order, Abraham was righteous, then God chose Abraham. In fact, some of the rabbis of Paul's day taught that Abraham had never sinned! How one can read the Genesis account of Abraham's life and come to that conclusion is hard to understand. If Paul can show that Abraham was justified by faith, he has proven his point and struck a severe blow against the self-righteous attitudes of the rabbis of his day.

Some representative quotes from apocryphal literature will show just how Abraham was viewed by the rabbis of Paul's day.

Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he was found faithful. Therefore the Lord assured him by an oath that the nations would be blessed through his posterity; that he would multiply him like the dust of the earth, and exalt his posterity like the stars, and cause them to inherit from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Ecclesiasticus 44:19-21).

Therefore thou, O Lord, God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin against thee, but thou hast appointed repentance for me, who am a sinner (The Prayer of Manasseh 1:8).

Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and wellpleasing in righteousness all the days of his life (Book of the Jubilees 23:10).

Paul's selection of Abraham was no accident. It was the best example he could possibly have chosen in order to prove that justification was by faith apart from doing the law. In Galatians 3:6 Paul points back to Genesis 15:6, which reads, "*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" Abraham received the righteousness of God, imputed by his faith, when he believed what God told him about an everlasting seed. Furthermore, Paul points out that Abraham is a model of all who would be justified by showing that justification is the result of faith, not of works.

If we closely examine these verses along with Galatians 3:16 we find that all people are receive God's blessing by Abraham two ways. The first, as we have already mentioned, is that Abraham is a model of justification by faith. Just as Abraham believed God and as a result was justified, even so we believe God and are justified. Secondly, all nations are blessed because of Abraham in the sense that it is through Abraham's seed the Messiah came (Galatians 3:19). If Christ had not been born, justification would be impossible, even for those who believe.

Negatively From The Old Testament - Galatians 3:10-12

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Negatively, Paul now shows from the Old Testament that the law cannot save. This is the stumblingblock that the Jews constantly tripped over. Their entire system of belief was based

on human merit, a merit which they obtained by keeping the law. Because of this, they skipped over the concept of faith, since to them faith was not needed for salvation.

Paul proves the cursedness of the law by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26 which reads, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.” and by quoting Leviticus 18:5 which says, “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them.” The point Paul is making is this, “If righteousness comes by the law, then the only way to get that righteousness is to keep the whole law without fail.” In other words, the law is God’s perfect standard, a standard so high that no one can perfectly keep it, and a standard in which the least infraction carries the penalty of death, both spiritual and physical. How can one be justified by keeping an impossible standard, when the least infraction results in immediate death? The implied answer, one can not. Those who seek justification by keeping the law find themselves under God’s curse.

So if righteousness is not attained by keeping the law, then how is it attained. It is attained by faith. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 which reads, “but the just shall live by his faith.” How is a man made just, by his faith. This implies that faith and works are mutually exclusive. They cannot mix, as to do so invalidates both.

Christ’s Redemptive Work - Galatians 3:13-14

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

So then, how are all nations now justified? It is by faith in Christ. Abraham was justified when he believed what God told him about an everlasting seed, whereas those that live after the time of Christ are justified when they believe what God said about Christ in the Gospel of Grace.

How is this possible? How is one delivered from the curse of the law? After all, the law says that if one breaks even one of its least commandments, they are to pay the penalty of spiritual death. The way one is delivered from the curse of the law is to believe on the one who became a curse for us. Christ paid the price for our sin, taking the curse in himself on the cross, in order that those who believe on him could escape God’s wrath. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:24, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” Christ paid the substitutionary price for our sin. He became sin for us, so that we could be made the righteousness of God.

The idea of Christ hanging on a tree is taking from Jewish law. When a person who was a criminal was killed by stoning, that person would sometimes be taken and tied on a tree or post as a warning to others as to what would happen if they violated the law. The fact that one hung on a tree was not a sign that they became cursed by that, but that they were cursed. Christ hung on the cross because he took in himself the curse of sin so that we could be saved.

Those that believe in the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross have eternal life. It is not enough that they merely understand the facts, but they must understand the implication of those facts and then appropriate those facts for themselves. When they do that, they follow in the steps of Abraham who is the Father of all who believe. Those that believe the Gospel of Grace are also given the promise of the Spirit. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit which Christ promised to those that were his. Both the blessings of God, and the Spirit of God, come by faith and not by works.

So Why The Law? - Galatians 3:15-22

So now one big question remains. If a person is justified by faith, they why in the world did God give the law? What is the place of the law in God's redemptive plan. This is the question next addressed by Paul. In this section we find the first part of Paul's answer to that question. We first find that the law was never meant to replace the promise, and then we find that the law is inferior to the promise. In the next section of this chapter, we find the purpose of the law in bringing men to Christ.

The Superiority of God's Promise - Galatians 3:15-18

A Superior Confirmation - Galatians 3:15

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

Paul is here talking about the promise mentioned in verses fourteen and sixteen. His point is that God made this promise to Abraham apart from Abraham doing anything. In fact, in Genesis 15 we find that God affirmed his promise to Abraham by performing an ancient ritual used by the Hittite culture to bind two parties in a covenant. What would happen in that culture is that if two people wanted to make a binding covenant, they would take some animals and cut them in half. Both parties would then walk through the middle of the cut up animals thus signifying that if any one of the parties would violate their covenant, they would be made like the animals. When God made his covenant with Abraham, God himself passed through the middle of the animals all by himself. The reason for this is simple. God was making a one-sided covenant with Abraham and was binding himself to fulfill it.

Furthermore, once a covenant was made between two parties, it could not be modified or changed. Therefore, God's promise to Abraham of a seed, and Abraham's justification by faith, could have no more conditions added to it. Once God bound himself to Abraham, he could not go back on his word. Therefore, the promise supersedes the law in that the law could never replace the promise any more than one could add conditions to a covenant after the covenant was affirmed.

A Superior Person - Galatians 3:16

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

To whom did God make his promise. We find here that ultimately it was Christ. In other words, every promise of God has its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Therefore, how does one become partaker of these promises? It is to become a fellowheir with Christ through faith. Apart from Christ and his finished work on the cross there is no salvation.

A Superior Chronology - Galatians 3:17

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

Paul further proves the superiority of the promise by pointing to the fact that the promise came 430 years before the law. Since once a covenant is made it cannot be altered, the promise of necessity supersedes the law in importance. Furthermore, the fact that the promise came 430

years before the law proves beyond dispute that Abraham was not justified by keeping the law since the law did not exist. He had to have been justified by faith in believing God's promise.

A Superior Coverage - Galatians 3:18

For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Finally, the promise is superior because it has a greater coverage than the law. The point here is that if a man is justified by the law, then justification is based in part on man's performance. On the other hand, if justification is by faith, then man's performance plays no part in the salvific process. Our inheritance is not granted (*charizomai*, to give graciously) on the basis of works, but on the basis of faith.

The Inferiority of the Law - Galatians 3:19-22

An Inferior Purpose - Galatians 3:19a

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions,

The first reason the law is inferior to the promise is that the law serves an inferior purpose. The purpose of the promise was to produce justification, the purpose of the law is to show man his utter depravity. The word used for transgressions, *parabasis*, means "to step over the line." The law was given so that men could see just how far over the line they stepped so they would recognize their need of a savior. Paul states this in Romans 5:20 where he writes, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." In other words, the law entered to show man how hopeless their situation was, and how desperately they needed God's solution and not their own. It was never given to produce righteousness, but to reveal unrighteousness.

An Inferior Mediatorship - Galatians 3:19b-20

till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

The second reason the law is inferior is that it was mediated by angels and not God. We read in Exodus that the law came through angels to Moses to Israel. In other words, God was not directly involved in the giving of the law to Israel, but used intermediaries. On the other hand, God personally gave his promise to Abraham without the agency of angels. This is what appears to be meant by verse twenty which seems to say that the only time one needs a mediator is when two parties are involved. Since God made the covenant of promise with Abraham by himself alone, no mediator was needed.

An Inferior Result - Galatians 3:21-22

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Paul closes this section on the inferiority of the law by asking the question, "Is the law then against the promise." In other words, does the existence of law contradict the promises of God? His immediate and forceful answer is "God forbid." God does not work against himself, nor does he give contradictory promises and covenants. This is stated by Paul when he says that if

it were possible that righteousness come by the law, then there would be a contradiction as there would be two ways to salvation. Since righteousness can never come by the law, there is no contradiction.

So then what does the law do? It “shuts up” all men under sin. The word for “concluded” is *sunkleio*, which means to “lock up securely with no way of escape.” The law backs men into an inescapable corner where they see that there is no way in the world they can attain unto the righteousness of God. This forces men to turn to God for a way of escape which is available only to those who believe in the Gospel of Grace by faith.

Christ Or The Law? - Galatians 3:23-29

The question now faced by man is what to do about Christ. Those that reject Christ find themselves under the bondage of the law, and inescapable prison. Those the accept Christ are freed from the bondage of the law into the liberty that is in Christ. In this section Paul first shows the nature of the bondage of the law and then shows the character of our liberty in Christ.

The Bondage Of the Law - Galatians 3:23-25

The Law Is A Prison - Galatians 3:23

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

The first way in which the bondage of the law is seen is that it is a prison. Man is kept under the custody of the law in the same way a criminal is kept in prison until his sentence is carried out or he is freed by the judge. How is man to be released from the bondage of the law? By faith which would be revealed by God, and has been revealed in Christ.

The Law Is A Guardian - Galatians 3:24

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The second way in which the bondage of the law was seen is that the law was a schoolmaster. The word used, *paidagogos*, referred to a slave whose job was to make sure that a child did their schoolwork and who also disciplined the child when necessary. The notion of a strict disciplinarian is not far from the truth here. The law is a strict disciplinarian, always showing men just how far short of God’s perfection they come. It’s purpose is to show men their utter depravity in order that they may turn to Christ who alone can provide freedom from the bondage of the law. Just as it was a great day for a child to be freed from the bondage of their *paidagogos*, so it is a great day when a man is delivered from the bondage of the law to freedom in Christ.

Christ Is Freedom - Galatians 3:25-29

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

After a man turns to Christ in faith the purpose of the law has been fulfilled. The curses that it pronounced, and the impossible standard it demanded, had served to show the new believer just how utterly hopeless their situation was. Once they come to Christ in faith, the bondage and rule of the law is over. Instead of bondage is freedom. Instead of the curse is three glorious

privileges. Instead of a condemned prisoner, one is made a son of God, one with other believers, and a joint-heir with Christ.

Sons of God - Galatians 3:26-27

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The first great privilege in Christ is that we have been made sons of God. We are no longer children or slaves, but full-fledged sons with all the rights and responsibilities given to sons. Who is granted this sonship? It is those who have been baptized into Christ. This is not water baptism, but spirit baptism. The root idea of baptism is identification. We have been identified with Christ (Romans 6:1-14), and as a result we have put on Christ. This results in not only our justification, but the receipt of all the blessings of God. In fact, our position of blessedness is the same as that of Christ!

Oneness in Christ - Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, not only are we sons of God, but we are one with all other believers. In the body of Christ all gender, social, and ethnic distinctions are erased. Whether one is ethnically a Jew or Greek is irrelevant. Whether one is bond or free is irrelevant. Whether one is male or female is irrelevant. The only relevant issue is our oneness in Christ. We go from a state of bondage to a state of spiritual equality with Jesus Christ himself!

Heirs of God's Promise - Galatians 3:29

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Finally, we are made heirs of Christ. This means that we inherit all of the blessings Christ inherits because of his perfect obedience to the Father. Paul writes in Romans 8:15-17, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." We are no longer under the bondage of fear and the bondage of the law, but have immense freedom in our new relationship with God as a fellowheir of all that he has.