



Grace not Law as the Means of Justification Galatians 3

Introduction

The Galatian believers were being seduced into a works religion where the emphasis shifted from Christ as only means of salvation to self as the one striving to please God.

In Galatians one and two, Paul stressed the impossibility of adding the requirement of works to one's faith in Christ for salvation. He did this in five ways.

1. Paul expressed astonishment over the Galatian's defection - Chapter 1.
2. Paul established his unearned apostleship - Chapter 1.
3. Paul reviewed his own experience of salvation by faith - Chapter 1.
4. Paul reviewed the church council's conclusion on law and circumcision - Chapter 2.
5. Paul defined justification by faith - Chapter 2

Works cannot save. Only faith in Christ can save. "Sola fides," by faith alone, was the rallying cry of the Reformation fifteen hundred years later when, once again, the issue of works needed to be resolved. Human pride wants to earn salvation, but Paul's doctrine is unshakable and unmistakable. Where justification is concerned, faith and works are mutually exclusive.

The second major division of Galatians, Chapters 3 and 4, explains further that justification is by Grace (through faith) not Law.

Outline of Galatians 3

- I. The Spirit is a Fruit of Faith Not Law - Galatians 3:1-14
- II. The Covenant of Promise Preceded The Law - Galatians 3:15-29

I. The Spirit is a Fruit of Faith Not Law - Galatians 3:1-14

The most immediate result of faith in Christ is receiving the Holy Spirit within one's being. It is not the result of obedience to a legalistic system but rather the instantaneous response of a gracious God to a sinner's feeblest faith in believing. Paul implores the Galatians to examine what they have done.

A. Bewitched to Switch - Galatians 3:1-2

1. The Truth of Christ - 3:1

should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? Paul appeals to truth. Paul had preached the truth, and it is the truth alone that deserves obedience. No sensible person chooses to obey a lie. Would you keep an appointment knowing the other person had lied about being there? A person must be very deceived to exchange the truth for a lie. Do you believe the truth of God's word or some popular lie?

2. The Crucified Christ - 3:1,2

The Christ Paul preached was the Christ Who had saved him, the One with nail-prints in His hands and feet. It is only when you see Jesus crucified for you, that you can begin to appreciate His sacrifice. Can you say, "He died for my sins...He took my place under God's wrath...His death sets me free from guilt and bondage of sin?" To agree that your sin caused the death of the Son of God is to admit the truth (1 John 1:8).

3. Foolish Galatians - 3:1

Strong words, *bewitched* and *foolish*, describe the Galatians. They had been deceived by servants of Satan who spoke with his subtlety and persuasiveness (Genesis 3:1). Where are you being foolish by listening to wrong voices? Go instead to Jesus Christ. He will make the truth plain.

B. Benefits of Belief - Galatians 3:2-5

1. Receiving the Spirit - 3:2

The most wonderful validation of one's faith is the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This comes by the activity of faith, not by keeping the Law (Romans 8:2,14).

2. Beginning with the Spirit - 3:3

The Spirit sets believers on their spiritual journey and stirs them for God in a way the Law could not do.

3. Suffering as a Christian - 3:4

Have you suffered so many things in vain - if indeed it was in vain? The believers had suffered rejection or alienation from loved ones, business associates or friends. If the suffering could be avoided by keeping a few rules, it would be pointless.

4. Miracles of the Spirit - 3:5a

The Holy Spirit in one's life brings change and power.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you

Some of these are, truly miraculous. The Law had no power to work miracles.

5. The Means - the hearing of faith - 3:5b

God uses the communication of the gospel to save people. Romans 10:14 asks, "*How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?*" Paul had been that preacher. They had heard and believed. Who is waiting to hear the gospel from you? Many converts echo the theme "If only we had heard sooner."

Have you received the Holy Spirit and begun your Christian life by His power? Do you depend on that power daily for miracles of faith? Are you willing to suffer for Him so that His power can flow through you to others?

C. Blessing of Abraham or Curse of Law - Galatians 3:6-14

1. Abraham's Faith - 3:6

a. Exemplary

Abraham is the example of faith which counts for righteousness. We need righteousness because God requires it, but we have none. We are bankrupt when it comes to righteousness (Isaiah 64:6). How are we to get that which God requires? God credits it to us when we believe His word. That is His grace to us. Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

b. Reproduced as Legacy and Progeny - 3:7

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. When we exercise faith as Abraham did, we enter his family and become his spiritual children.

c. Rewarded - 3:8

The Scripture is personified twice in this chapter (see 3:22) and nowhere else in the New Testament. *The Scripture* foresaw that faith in Christ would justify the nations and thus it was the Gospel that was preached to Abraham when God told him, *In you (through his descendant, Christ) all the nations shall be blessed.* The blessing bestows much more than the law could ever give, as noted above (Genesis 12:3, John 8:56).

2. The Law's Curse - 3:10-14

a. Built-in

The curse built into the law is that it must be kept perfectly or it is not kept at all (James 2:10). There is an all-or-nothing unity about the Law whereby a

person cannot break one tenet only. It is like taking just one step off a bridge. You do not need to take the rest. Breaking one law makes a person a lawbreaker outwardly. We break the law because we are lawbreakers inwardly. So, the law can condemn us but it cannot justify us. The law has no power to make us good, only to reveal that we are not good. Therefore, the just live by faith, not law.

"Run, run and do" the law commands,
But gives us neither feet nor hands.
Better news the gospel brings,
It bids us fly and gives us wings.

J. Vernon McGee

b. The Curse and the Just - 3:11

Since the law can only curse, not justify, those who need to be justified, must live by another means, faith. The prophet Habakkuk grappled with God's justice and cried, *The just shall live by faith*, as he realized how to relate to God (Habakkuk 3:8).

Paul quotes Habakkuk in both Galatians and Romans 1:17, as does the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 10:38.

c. Christ's Redemption by Becoming a Curse - 3:12-14

The death of Christ was "substitutionary" or "vicarious," which means He died in our place. Paul refers to Deuteronomy 21:23, where the law says that death by hanging is a curse because it was a criminal's death. It was so ignominious that the Jews did not use it but used stoning instead. After being stoned, the bodies could be hanged as an example but could not be left overnight because of the stigma of sin in the land. Anyone hanging on a tree was a criminal and cursed. For the time that the body hung there, the land was cursed also for having allowed, propagated and tolerated, sin.

Christ, who never sinned, became a curse by taking our sins on Himself. *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). The transaction is complete in the exchange of His life for the life of the sinner. His life was given for yours, so that your life might be for Him. What a gracious, glorious exchange.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law so that the *blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles*. This blessing refers to the receiving of the Holy Spirit, Who makes us righteous by transforming us into the image of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:18). That is the promise of the Spirit (through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ). This is the same for Jew as for Gentile.

II. The Covenant of Promise Preceded the Law Galatians - 3:15-29

A. The Abrahamic Covenant

1. By Grace

Paul goes back beyond Moses and the Mosaic Covenant of Law, to the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21). It was a covenant of grace which was independent of Abraham's goodness or lack of goodness. Abraham's faith did not generate the Covenant but it did personalize it. It became known as the Abrahamic Covenant. This also applies to Adam and the Adamic Covenant, Noah and the Noahic Covenant and David and the Davidic Covenant. When God has a work to do, He chooses someone who will respond in faith. Are you that kind of person for the work God wants to do in this generation?

2. Two Parts

a. Earthly

The Abrahamic Covenant had two parts. The first part was local, geographical and national. It applied to the land of Palestine which God gave to Abraham's descendants and to the nation of Israel, through whom the Messiah would come - a land and a people.

b. Heavenly

However, the Abrahamic Covenant goes beyond that. It also promises a spiritual destiny to God's people, the spiritual heritage of Christ and His Kingdom. In Galatias, Paul addresses this second part, the spiritual heritage of Abraham, to which all believers belong.

B. The Promise - Galatians 3:15

1. Irrevocable

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Even in human terms, a promise is a promise. Covenants, contracts and agreements are binding and protected by law. In this they illustrate God's covenants. Worldly covenants are like God's covenants in that they help us to understand His promise as binding.

2. God's Character in His Word to Abraham

God's promise is backed by His character. God cannot lie. When God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, *Surely blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee* (Hebrews 6:13-14).

3. God's word to us

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise (us) the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:17-19). Do you trust God and His word fully?

4. Recipient(s) - 3:16

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your seed,' who is Christ. God's promise is to Abraham's Seed. Paul makes it plain that "Seed" here is not plural but refers to an individual, Jesus Christ. Those who are the recipients and heirs of the promise are those who are in Christ (Genesis 3:15; Ephesians 1:3).

5. Promise Over Law - Galatians 3:17-18

The Law came 430 years after the covenant and could not annul the covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed *in Christ*, giving a double guarantee. First, God said it. Then Christ affirmed it by His incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

Furtermore, an inheritance is bestowed by the grace of the giver. The Law cannot grant an inheritance which the giver has not given. If the giver gives it, the Law doesn't need to grant it.

D. Purpose of the Law - Galatians 3:19-24

1. Transgressions - 3:19

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. The Law was a temporary measure to deal with man's sinfulness. Like handcuffs, the purpose of the law was to control human behavior until the Spirit came to indwell believers after Christ's ascension, enabling man to control himself!

The Law was transmitted to man through Moses, who received it from angels. The Covenant of Promise came to Abraham directly from God.

2. Unmediated - 3:20

Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. There are many interpretations of this puzzling verse. The first part is clear enough, a mediator is not

needed for less than two people. Moses received the Law from mediators, angels, and he was the mediator who brought the Law to Israel. But God dealt solely and directly with Abraham.

3. Good - 3:21

The Law is good, not bad, since it is God given (see Psalm 19 and 119). It could even have been the means of righteousness if it could have given life.

4. Condemnatory - 3:22

Under the Law everyone is condemned as a sinner, for no one can keep the Law perfectly. Therefore every person needs Christ, Who is given to individuals by promise and by grace. God could have left mankind condemned in their sin. But He sent Jesus according to His plan, to give every individual the opportunity to believe.

5. Schoolmaster - 3:23-25

The Law was a *tutor*, or schoolmaster, *to bring people to Christ*. It was apparent from the Garden of Eden that a Savior was needed, but it would be centuries until His arrival. Meanwhile, mankind increased in iniquity. God responded with acts of judgment to preserve the human race. First the flood purged the world of its fatal wickedness, leaving only one man and his family. That man was Noah, a *just man who walked with God* (Genesis 6:9) and he *found grace in the eyes of the Lord* (Genesis 6:8). But soon evil and godlessness spread again. People honored themselves instead of God. When they arrogantly planned to build a tower *whose top is in the heavens* (Genesis 11:4), God confused their language so they were unable to understand one another. The confusion at the Tower of Babel slowed man's rebellion against God.

Then God chose one man and his family, Abraham, as the depository of truth and hope while the rest of the world went its sinful, destructive way. The Law was given to Abraham's descendants as a temporary means for preservation from evil. It put restrictions on human behavior and provided orderly, prescribed sacrifices to atone for the inevitable transgressions due to sin. "The age of law was a time of discipline. The Law serving as a schoolmaster...a slave whose job it was to see that the pupil arrived at school safely" (Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, Galatians 3).

D. Freedom from the Law in Christ - Galatians 3:25-29

1. Schoolmaster Outgrown - 3:25-29

But after faith has come, there is no longer need for a tutor. The arrival of Christ ended the need for the schoolmaster. By faith, believers are in Christ and are God's mature children. In the Roman world, at the age of seventeen a youth took of his "toga praeparta" and exchanged it for the "toga virilus." The immature youth became a man. In like manner Paul says, we have "*put on*" Christ.

2. Full freedom - 3:28-29

Paul not only spells out the believer's precious freedom in Christ but he applies it on several fronts:

Freedom from Jewish and Gentile divisions
Freedom from slave and free divisions
Freedom from male and female divisions.

These are divisions in the natural world that are non-existent in the spiritual realm. The ground at the Cross is level (Colossians 3:11). Everyone is equally important and loved by God. Working this truth out in daily life is the believer's challenge. It does not mean that God gives the same gifts to everyone or that He has the same purpose for everyone's life. But it does mean full equality and full participation in the gospel and the great commission.

In Christ there is a purpose for each life, and that is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). The purpose of our freedom is that we might choose to be like Him and submit joyously to the process. The slave who was freed could choose to remain with his master and serve him in love (Deuteronomy 15:16-17). Do you love and serve because it is commanded, or out of unbounded love and gratitude for what God has done for you in sending His Son to die for you?

Applications

1. How much of the freedom which Christ has bought for you are you enjoying?
2. Will you thank Him for freeing you from the bondage of sin and law and serve Him out of love?