

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

(SB_Galatians_Lsn5_Chapter 3)

In our previous study, we observed that in the closing verses of chapter 2, Paul presents what is in effect his thesis that he will develop in the following chapters. I’ve copied chapter 2:16-21 below and inserted a few comments that provide a good introduction to the material in the following chapters that we will review beginning with the current study.

16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. 17 “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 “For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. 20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. 21 “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”¹ (Gal 2:16-21)

Verse 16 is one of the most important verses in Scripture. Paul unequivocally states that “justification” (i.e. a judicial term used to declare one not guilty) is attained only through faith in Jesus Christ – not any human deeds. The unbeliever, either knowingly or unwittingly, depends upon his or her own goodness or righteousness to satisfy God. It is and has been a universal and timeless principle – true in Paul’s day just as it is in our day and just as it will be in the future – that the unbeliever is one who relies upon his or her own goodness to satisfy God’s righteous standards. (See Rev 20:11-15 where John presents the final analysis of the state of such individuals). Paul will develop the doctrine of justification by faith apart from works of the Law in chapter 3:1-4:7.

In verse 17, Paul anticipates and negates an objection to the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It is the same argument one frequently hears today. The argument is that such a simple gospel encourages lawlessness or antinomianism. If the Mosaic Law or any other code of moral responsibility is eliminated as a basis for salvation, then you have eliminated man’s motivation and responsibility to live properly. Paul elaborates in more detail on the issue of Christian liberty from the Law and freedom to walk and serve as motivated by the Holy Spirit in chapter 4:7 thru 5:6.

On the contrary, returning to the Law actually detracts from a focus on what is necessary to satisfy God’s righteousness (verse 18). The case in point was Peter’s conduct that was the basis for Paul’s reprimand. If one believes that keeping the Law or doing good can save a person, then that person will never understand the true character of God – the essence of God – and will never be able to properly adjust to God’s righteousness. Understanding the essence of God is essential to accepting His gift. Paul elaborates on this principle in 5:7-15.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

This understanding permeates every area of our lives (verse 19 & 20). If we live by the Law and believe we can satisfy God's righteousness through our own goodness or good works, then we have effectively negated the work of Christ on the Cross. Paul provides practical applications of this concept in Galatians 5:16 to 6:10.

The following chart reflects the relationship between Paul's thesis statement or summary statement in chapter 2 verses 16-21 and the remainder of his letter. This division is not meant to imply that each section is mutually exclusive and doesn't contain other elements of thought, e.g. justification by faith alone apart from the Law is a pervasive thought. However, Paul does seem to highlight each concept more thoroughly in each section.

Chapter 2:16-21	Thought That is Developed More Fully	Developed In
Verse 16	Justification is through faith, not works	3:1-4:7
Verse 17	Freedom from the Law is not a license to sin, but provides motivation from love to serve	4:7 to 5:6
Verse 18	Emphasis upon the Law blinds one to the necessity of grace & distorts one's understanding of God's essence	5:7-15
Verses 19-20	A proper view of God's essence & policy of grace is essential to the Christian walk and life	5:16 to 6:10

PAUL DEVELOPS AND SUPPORTS HIS THESIS (3:1-6:10)

Justification is Through Faith, Not Works (3:1-4:7)

The Doctrinal Issue Introduced (3:1-5)

Paul has discussed his own experience to this point in the letter and in so doing, he focused upon his personal transformation from one who was a self-righteous adherent to the Judaistic, Law-structured system to one who fully embraced God's grace for salvation and daily living. (See 1:11 thru 2:14). He had changed so radically that he now found it necessary to challenge the foremost of Jesus' Twelve (i.e. Peter) for not showing consistency in regard to the principle of grace (2:11-14).

At this point in the letter, Paul shifts to address the Galatians for their inconsistency – a subject that he introduced in 1:6-9. Notice the connection between Paul's opening remarks in these verses and the subject to which he returns here in chapter 3, i.e. the fickleness of the Galatians.

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

[Remainder of chapter 1 and chapter 2 devoted to Paul's personal journey from a legalistic orientation to a grace orientation]

3:1 **YOU** foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 **Are you so foolish?** Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was

in vain? 5 Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:1-5)

The fickle Galatians – Note that Paul addresses these believers with the less personal title of “Galatians” instead of the more personal title of “brethren” in verse 11. The reason – Paul is going to address a vital doctrine and some related Truths that are being rejected. It is a grave thing to reject Truth once a person has been exposed to Truth and accepted Truth.

Paul highlights some logically inexplicable behavior – even though we can see clearly what had happened. The Galatians had not internalized and meditated on the Truths that Paul had taught them. They readily accepted Paul’s grace based Truth. When opposing logic presented itself that was based upon what had been applicable Truth at one time, the Galatians had no internal defense. The result was that the Galatians had demonstrated illogical behavior.

Principle: If all you do is listen to Truth communicated and you never internalize Truth through personal meditation, you will at some point accept the argument of opposing logic built upon half-truths.

Principle: A half-truth is half-false; therefore, a half-truth is false.

Principle: Believers who have been exposed to Truth for years can consistently demonstrate behavior that is antithetical to Truth.

Paul uses an interesting word to describe the irrationality of the behavior of the Galatians. Paul uses the Greek word *anoetos* (ἀνόητος) which is translated “foolish.” Rather than use the Greek word that refers to one who is mentally deficient or who just acts like a fool, this Greek word means the person can think but just refuses or fails to use his powers of perception (see also Rom 1:14; 1 Tim 6:9; Titus 3:3).²

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. (Rom 1:14)

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. (1 Tim 6:9)

3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (Titus 3:3)

Thus, Paul is connecting their confused state of mind to what is really mental and spiritual laziness. Like a slave, they just want to be told what to do – “just give me the list of what is right and wrong and that’s what I’ll do.” “Don’t ask or require me to exert any mental energy or manifest any desire to pursue the Truth.” As such, they were rejecting the pursuit of wisdom (see Prov 1:20 thru 2:22).

If they had been thinking, Paul asserts that they would have recognized the inherent illogic of the position of the Judaizers that they were being enticed to follow. Any doctrine that defines grace to include man’s performance, either for salvation or for living the life of the believer, effectively declares the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as unnecessary. With a bit of sarcastic humor, Paul asked them how this could be. Had they been placed under some magic spell – “bewitched.”

² Frank E. Gabelein, general editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), electronic version.

In verse 1, it is important to note that Paul uses the perfect tense for the Greek word that is translated “crucified” – *stauroō* (σταυροῶ). The perfect tense connotes a completed action, the results of which are perpetuated indefinitely. The work of Christ accomplished the provision for man’s salvation once and forevermore. Nothing can be added and nothing can be taken.

In verse 2, Paul begins to guide his readers through a set of logical arguments. He asks them to consider how they had received the Holy Spirit. Paul asks the question in such a way that indicates that he only wanted them to focus upon one thing given their confused state of mind – literally, “this only do I wish to learn from you?” Did it come through keeping the Law or by faith? Paul anticipates their answer in verse 3 and once again calls them “foolish.”

In verse 5, Paul repeats his question; however, this time he is not asking them to answer. He is asking the question from God’s viewpoint using the question as a rhetorical device to introduce the flow of his logic throughout the remainder of his letter. Paul’s question was whether God who gave them the Holy Spirit did so through the works of the Law or through faith as a result of hearing? The essence of their dilemma – Law verses faith?

The Test Question

Faith Through Hearing?		Keeping the Law?	
3:6-9	Faith – Abraham?	3:10-14	Law – the Curse?
3:15-18	Faith – Covenant?	3:19-25	Law – transgressions?
3:26-29	Faith – Heirs?	4:1-7	Law – bondage?

The Doctrinal Argument Developed & Illustrated – the Faith of Abraham vs. the Law (3:6-4:7)

➤ Illustration #1 – The Faith of Abraham vs. the Curse of the Law (3:6-14)

The Faith of Abraham (vv. 6-9) – Paul chooses Abraham as his first illustration for a number of reasons. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. He is the clearest example of justification by faith in Hebrew Scripture. The Judaizers were certainly highlighting the fact that Abraham had been circumcised – an act designed to physically represent his faith and identification with God’s covenant promise.

6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:6-9)

Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6, a passage in Hebrew Scripture that irrefutably states that Abraham was saved or considered righteous by God based upon his faith alone. Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation was saved by faith – not a work.

In verses 7 & 8, Paul further develops and supports his argument using Abraham’s life as an illustration. Gentiles are spiritual sons of Abraham when they believe as did Abraham. As a matter of fact, God allowed for this and predicted that it would happen when he told Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations (i.e. Gentiles) in Genesis 12:3. Of course, the Gentile nations that were the object or focus of this promise at the time the promise was given to Abraham were the believing Gentile nations that will constitute the Messianic Kingdom along with saved Israel. Through Paul, God is explaining how some of the same spiritual benefits to one day be experienced by the Gentiles of the Messianic kingdom are now to be experienced by an entirely new body of faith – Gentiles of the intercalated age of the Body of Christ. (See Psa 87; Jn 17:11, 21-23 cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:15; 4:4-6).

Paul states the doctrinal conclusion in verse 9 – believers, Gentile and Jew, are blessed through the same faith that was exercised by Abraham. Since the blessing of Abraham is declared to have been intended for the Gentiles also, how could the Gentiles be blessed except by faith? To have been blessed in any other way would have involved their ceasing to be Gentiles.³

The Curse of the Law (vv. 10-14) – Paul now deals with the flip side of his argument – the counterpart argument – justification by the Law is inherently impossible. If one really wants to be justified by the Law, there are some inherent obligations that make it impossible. Paul makes three major points: (1) Those living under the principle of law are under the law's curse, for the law pronounces a curse upon all who fail to keep the law in its entirety; (2) no one is justified by law, since the law itself teaches that men are justified by faith; and (3) no mixture of these principles is possible, for they are mutually exclusive.

On top of this convincing argument Paul adds a full reference to the work of Christ in verse 14. The work of Christ is twofold: (1) it is a work of redemption from the curse that the law has imposed on everybody; and (2) a work of blessing by which the promise of the Spirit made to Abraham is fulfilled for all who believe on Christ as Savior.

10 For as many as 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 BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" — 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:10-14)

Note that Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 which reads – "Cursed is the one who does not conform to all the words of this law." Furthermore, Scripture clearly indicates that faith is the *modus Vivendi* of the righteous man. Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 in verse 11 ("The righteous man shall live by faith") to illustrate the point that righteousness in daily life comes through faith.

Paul argues in verse 12 that keeping the Law and faith are mutually exclusive. If one adopts the Law as his or her means of becoming righteous, then Leviticus 18:5 requires that all of the requirements of the Law must be kept. Who can make the claim that they have kept every requirement of the Law without exception?

The answer to this dilemma is clearly found in the work of Jesus Christ and faith in that work – not one's own. Paul quotes from another Hebrew Scripture (Deut 21:23) to prove his point – Jesus hung on a tree, a Cross of wood, and became the payment for our sins. This is central to salvation and the receipt of God's righteousness to believers of all dispensations. God's spiritual blessing to Gentiles is merely a derivative of the covenant God made with Abraham. Thus, in a spiritual sense, all who exercise the same faith as did Abraham are spiritual children of Abraham even though genetically, they are not Jews.

Paul's argument boils down to this. Why try to impose a mere physical ritual upon people so that they might come under the blessing of covenant relationship when they are spiritual children of Abraham?

³ Gaebelein, *Expositor's Commentary*, electronic version.

Please do not misunderstand or misquote me here. I do not embrace or promote the notion that God is fulfilling His promises made to Abraham and to Israel in His covenant with them through us, the believers of the Body of Christ. Some covenant and Reformed theologians extend Paul's point too far and indicate that the believers of the present dispensation of the Body of Christ have "replaced" Israel as the recipient of God's covenant promises with Abraham. This is called "Replacement theology" and is a terrible distortion. It effectively lays the foundation for a denial of the fulfillment of the promises God has made to Israel expressed in the covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12) which have yet to be fulfilled and which are further amplified in God's promises regarding the Land (Deut 30:1-10), to David (2 Sam 7:12-16), and his promises regarding a new covenant that is written in the hearts of His people (Jer 31:31-34).

We, believers of the age of the Body of Christ, are not the recipients of God's promises to Israel. However, the spiritual blessings which are ours at the point of salvation are a mirror image of the blessings which will one day be experienced by believing Israel when God's covenant promises to the genetic descendants of Abraham are fulfilled in a manner that is similar to a magnification of our own experience. We are spiritual descendants of Abraham by virtue of our faith (like his) in Christ. However, we did not move into a position to be substitutes for Israel. We have received the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation, a blessing promised to the physical descendants of Abraham in such passages as Joel 2:28-32. However, the "Spirit of promise" that we have received at the point of salvation was not a phenomenon that was anticipated by the writers of Scripture prior to Paul. We are a part of an intercalated age of blessing that is Gentile-centric, not Jew-centric as was the Age of Israel and as will be true of the prophesied ages to come.