



SERIES: GALATIANS

GALATIANS 3:1-14

January 4, 2010

Recap: The churches in Galatia are being infiltrated by false teachers who are rejecting the teachings of Paul and replacing the true gospel with different gospels. Paul writes this letter as a rebuke to the Galatian churches, to defend his authority as an apostle, and to set forth again the true gospel of Jesus which is salvation by grace through faith, apart from good works.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publically portrayed as crucified.

The Christians in Galatia are in a state of mental drunkenness and they have lost their good senses by falling away from solid teaching and instead accepting false teaching. Paul reminds them in 2:21 that Jesus' death was necessary to forgive sin because the law could not justify any man. Thus, having bore witness to the crucifixion of Christ, the Galatians are fools for abandoning the teachings which are logically and historically consistent.

2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Paul hits the Galatians with five questions in a row. In this first question, he refers back to their salvation. Were they saved by good works or by faith in Jesus? The rhetorical answer is that they were saved by faith and not through the deeds of the law.

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Since you were saved and then indwelt by the Holy Spirit (and not the law), why then do you revert back to the law to increase in holiness? This is backwards thinking. Instead, Christians are to grow to be more like Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and not in their own strength. Virtually every Christian has had the experience of trying to overcome sin by sheer will-power and always experience failure. This is because only God can truly change a person and overcome sin. So, as believers, we ought to be being perfected by the Spirit and not through our own strength.

This may also explain why many Christians have an emotional experience at a retreat or conference and are on a "high" for God that quickly fades out. This type of Christian living is through the flesh and not through the Spirit. Those who overcome sin are those who practice the simple spiritual disciplines that God requires: continually reading the Bible, daily prayer, and being in community with God's people.

4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law,



or by hearing with faith—6 just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?

God does not give the Holy Spirit or perform miracles in response to good works, but rather through faith. Abraham is an example of this: he did not have the Bible and so he could not follow the law, but rather he had faith in God and was saved through his faith. Any person who has ever been saved (in both the Old and New Testaments) is saved by faith in God.

7 Know then that it is those 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 "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

All Christians are saved by faith and as such have followed in the footsteps of Abraham, the "man of faith". Additionally, through Abraham we have received the Bible, the prophets, and even (down the family tree) Jesus himself, who died to give us the gift of salvation. Thus, having received all this through Abraham's faith, certainly "all nations are blessed" through Abraham!

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Anyone who does not trust in Jesus for their salvation is by default trusting in themselves and their own goodness for salvation. The above verse makes it clear that these people are under a curse and are damned to hell if they don't come to Jesus in faith. Thus, all non-Christians are under a self-inflicted curse. God requires that we obey the whole law (never sin), which none of us has done. As such, if we have broken even one part of the law we have broken the entire law and stand condemned before God. Through Jesus, however, who *did* live a sinless life, we may have his righteousness through faith in him, break the curse, and be reconciled back to God.

11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." 12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Jesus is the hero. No person can stand before God by their own power. Rather, they need Jesus since he alone has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Jesus took upon himself our sin on the cross so that if we have faith in him we may have his righteousness. This trade is the free gift of salvation that only Jesus offers and is the possession of true Christians alone.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What sins in my life am I trying to overcome in my own strength? How can I turn to God the Holy Spirit for help in becoming more like Jesus?
2. Who in my life (friends or family) is living under a curse as a non-Christian? Ask God for boldness and the opportunity to share Jesus' offer of eternal life with them.
3. How does it affect my heart to know that Jesus saved me in a way that I never could?