

STUDY NOTES for GALATIANS THREE

JUSTIFICATION by FAITH

GALATIANS 3:1-29

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the scripture for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The Apostle Paul wrote the Galatian Christians a letter to correct the false doctrine that the Judaizers were teaching them. The Judaizers said salvation and sanctification were accomplished by keeping the Law of Moses. Paul composed his letter to begin with a defense of his apostolic authority which the Judaizers had viciously attacked (Gal 1-2). Then he dealt with the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the Law of Moses (Gal 3-4). Finally, he concluded his letter dealing with the deportment expected of true Christians (Gal 5-6).

Paul writes chapters 3-4 to show the Galatians the sharp contrast between the salvation offered by the Judaizers (faith in Christ plus the works of the Law) and the salvation offered by God through his preaching (faith in Christ alone). Paul defends justification by faith in God's promises with five reasons; he shows why salvation must be by faith alone in God's grace. Three of those reasons are covered in this lesson (Galatians 3). Three main words highlight the theme of this lesson by their repeated use: "law" (15 times), "faith" (14 times) and its cognate, "believe" (2 times), and "promise" (9 times). Salvation by grace through faith was promised by God in the Old Testament. It was completely apart from the works of the Law. Such a concept was diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Judaizers in Paul's day and is still opposed to the doctrine of many religious groups today. The importance of understanding the message of this chapter cannot be overemphasized in reconciling sinners to God.

A. Examination of the Galatians' Faith – 3:1-5

Paul begins his defense of justification by faith in Christ's finished work on the cross by asking the Galatians five questions. There is one question in each of the first five verses. These questions are designed to examine the faith of the Galatian believers and to show them that salvation and sanctification are not based on keeping the Law, but on believing the Gospel. The answers to these questions will give Paul's first reason that justification by faith is the true Gospel message.

3:1 – "*O foolish Galatians*" – Paul rebuked the Galatians for being foolish in rejecting the complete work of Christ for their salvation; they were acting without common sense.

"*Bewitched*" – he begins by questioning their sanity: "Who has bewitched you?" In other words, "Who has put the 'evil eye' on you so that you do not obey the truth?" The Galatians were spellbound by the Judaizers; they were overcome by the Judaizers' demand that they must keep the Law that God gave to Moses to be saved.

"*Before whose eyes*" - the Galatians should have kept their eyes on Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross and not on the Law of Moses.

"*Evidently set forth*" – Paul had clearly "set forth" Christ before their eyes by portraying His sacrifice on the cross for their sins. How could they disobey the truth of God and obey the error of the Judaizers. How could they turn their eyes from the complete work of Christ for their salvation and look to the Law of Moses to accomplish this humanly impossible task?

3:2 - "*Received ye the Spirit*" – Paul's **second question** relates to their reception of the Holy Spirit. Did they receive the Spirit by hearing the demands of the Law and keeping them or by hearing the Gospel of Christ and believing it? This was probably Paul's most important question and the answer was obvious. They had heard that Jesus Christ died for their sins and they believed this glorious truth, which saved them (Rom. 10:17). When they received Christ as their Savior, they received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

3:3 – Paul's **third question** refers to their sanctification, that is, the means by which they can live a godly, holy life. His question includes two doctrines which involve the Holy Spirit: the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of sanctification. He reminds them that they were saved by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so it is logical that they are sanctified by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Since they did not have the power to be saved by keeping the Law, Paul asks them why they think they have the power to keep the Law and live a godly life. Paul is attempting to show them that both salvation and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit; neither salvation nor sanctification can be accomplished by their good works.

"Having begun in the Spirit" – this refers to their salvation.

"Made perfect by the flesh" – this refers to their sanctification.

"Spirit . . . flesh" – Paul contrasts divine energy by the Spirit with human energy by the flesh. In other words he is showing it is a matter of faith in God's works vs. faith in their works.

3:4 - "*Suffered in vain*" – Paul asks his fourth question, which concerns the suffering that they had endured as believers: "Have you suffered for nothing?" Early believers suffered greatly for their faith in Christ alone. They suffered hardship at the hands of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles with the confiscation of their property and goods, the loss of their employment and their treatment as slaves. Some suffered physical harm, imprisonment and even death for their faith. The unbelieving Jews persecuted them for their faith in Christ without the works of the Law. They claimed salvation was not complete without keeping the Law of Moses. If the Galatian believers accepted this false doctrine, they no longer would be persecuted by the unbelieving Jews, but this would show that they were not true believers to be blessed with salvation from God. . As a result all their suffering for Christ was in vain.

"If it yet be in vain" – Paul hoped that their suffering was not in vain, but that they would reject the false doctrine of the Judaizers. He hoped that their faith in Christ was genuine.

3:5 Paul's fifth question focuses on God's supply of the Spirit in each of their lives. Did God give them the Spirit to do miracles when they kept the Law or when they heard the Gospel with faith?

- "*He ministered*" – this refers to God's gracious gift to supply the spiritual needs of the Galatian believers.

"The Spirit" - God's gracious gift was the Holy Spirit who dwells in each Galatian believer at the time of salvation. He does miracles in the spiritual lives of believers and many times in their physical lives. Paul's question is like his second and third questions (3:2-3), but this time he asks it from the Giver's viewpoint, not the receiver's. Paul asks his fifth question, "Did God give you the Holy Spirit to do miracles among you by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?" When the Spirit performed the miracle of the new birth in their midst (Jn 3:1-12), it was given to those that had faith in God's promise, not to those that tried to obey God's Law (Rom 5:1; 8:9, 14-16; 1 Cor 12:9; Eph 2:8-10). The miracle of being born again by the Spirit for salvation and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit to serve God in sanctification was given to those who had faith in the Giver.

B. Exposition of God's Word - 3:6-14

Paul continues to defend the doctrine of justification by faith with his second reason: it is supported by the Old Testament. The Judaizers claimed the Old Testament taught that justification is obtained by keeping the commands of the Law and it is still true for those that put their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul went to the Old Testament to prove the Judaizers misinterpreted the Old Testament Scriptures and were teaching a false doctrine. Justification by faith was not a new

doctrine that Paul preached, but a doctrine that is clearly seen in the life of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

1. Faith of Abraham - 3: 6-9

3:6 - *"Even as Abraham believed God"* - the rabbis used Abraham's life to settle controversies. Paul skillfully refuted the Judaizers by showing that Abraham was saved by faith, not by works (Gen. 15:6).

"Accounted" - imputed, put to Abraham's account.

"Righteousness" - this is what was put to Abraham's account by faith. It means Abraham was saved by faith before he did any works. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he added that Abraham was declared righteous by his faith in God's promise, even before his circumcision (Rom 4:9-11).

3:7 - *"The same"* - emphatically indicates that those of faith are the children of Abraham.

"Children of Abraham" - literally, "sons of Abraham." A child became a son when he took on the characteristic of a person, whether it was a good or bad person, i.e. "the sons of righteousness" or "the sons of Belial." Those who are characterized by Abraham's faith can be called sons of Abraham (Jn. 8:39). They are the spiritual children of Abraham whether Jew or Gentile, it makes no difference.

3:8 - *"That God would justify the heathen through faith"* - Gentiles are saved by the same rule of faith that Jews are saved. God told Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed," that is saved. This was predicted in the covenant that God gave to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) about 550 years before the law was given.

"Gospel unto Abraham" - this was the "good news" given to Abraham. He did not know the good news of Christ (His death and resurrection), but he believed the good news of God's Promise ("in thee shall all nations be blessed" - Gen 12:3).

3:9 - *"They which be of faith are blessed"* - the blessing of righteousness would be available to people of faith in all nations because of Abraham's faith in God (Gen. 12:3; 18:18). Abraham's faith in God's promise made it possible for Him to send His Son to earth through Mary, a descendant of Abraham. All who believe God will be blessed by God with salvation.

"Faithful Abraham" - this refers to the full faith of Abraham, not to his faithfulness.

2. Curse of the Law - 3: 10-14

3:10 - *"The works of the law"* - Judaizers claimed the works of the Law were necessary to be blessed with salvation. Paul will show that the opposite is true.

"Are under the curse" - rabbis taught that people who were ignorant of the Law were cursed (Jn. 7:49). They taught that keeping the Law brought a blessing. In reality the Law brought a curse instead of a blessing.

"It is written" - the Law curses everyone that does not keep all the laws of God. This is not limited to the Ten Commandments, but applies to over 600 commands of God (Deut. 27:26). If one law is broken, a person is guilty of breaking all the laws (James 2:10).

3:11 - *"No man is justified by the law"* - this was contrary to the teaching of the Judaizers, Paul quotes Habakkuk. 2:4 to show that justification by God is by faith and not by the Law. The Law was not given to justify a person, but to show all people that they are sinners that need to be justified (Rom 3:20).

3:12 - *"The law is not of faith"* - the Law is not "out of," or a result of faith. Faith and the Law are opposites and the one is not related to the other. Law demands doing; faith demands receiving. Paul said that the man that does them shall live in them (from Lev. 18:5). That means the person that depends on the Law for salvation must keep every law every day of his life. If he fails to keep

the Law even one time, he is cursed by the Law,

3:13 - *"Christ hath redeemed us"* – Christ paid the redemption price for all people so they can be freed from the penalty of sin (1 Jn 2:2). Only Christ had the ability to redeem us from the curse of the Law, because only He was without sin. If He had sinned, He could not pay the penalty for our sins; He would have to pay the penalty for His own sins. However, He did not sin, so He can be our Savior (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5).

"Being made a curse for us" - Christ became a curse in our place. He was our substitute. It is not stated how He became a curse, it is simply proven by the fact that He died on a cross, because anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed (Deut. 21:23). The cross was the tree on which Jesus was hung.

3:14 - *"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ"* – the blessing of Abraham for the Gentiles is justification by faith. This is salvation.

"That we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith" – the promise of the Spirit is the gift of the indwelling Spirit who enables believers to live a godly life by faith. This is sanctification.

C. Explanation of God's Promise - 3:15-29

Paul gives the Promise of God as his third reason for defending the doctrine of justification by faith. The Promise of God came hundreds of years before the Law of God, so it cannot be annulled by the Law.

1. Preeminence of the Promise - 3:15-18

3:15 - *"Brethren"* – a warm, affectionate address of those that Paul had previously called foolish (3:1, 3).

"I speak after the manner of men" - Paul was going to give an example from the affairs of men that would illustrate the enduring nature of a will or testament ("covenant").

"Confirmed" - ratified, established.

"Disannulled" – to invalidate, make null and void.

"Added thereto" - add a codicil to a will to modify it in some way. Once a will has been made and ratified, it is not changed except by the agreement of all parties concerned. If this is true of men, how much more true it is of God, Who never breaks His Promise.

3:16 – *"And to thy seed, which is Christ"* – Paul makes a clear statement concerning the recipients of God's Promise in the Abrahamic Covenant. He made it clear that "seed" refers to one person, not to many. Technically, "seed" can refer to many, but ultimately, and in its fullest sense, Christ is the only Person that can receive God's Promise. This is the intent of Paul's explanation.

3:17 - *"The law which was four hundred and thirty years after"* - it seems to say the Promise was given to Abraham first and then the Law was given to Moses 430 years later. The chronology of this statement, however, is in conflict with Ex. 12:40 which says Israel was in Egypt for 430 years. Although the chronology does not change the force of the argument, it does cast some question on Paul's knowledge of Old Testament Scripture and his ability to accurately record the infallible words of God. One solution to this problem is to begin these 430 years with the last ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant made with Jacob just before he went into Egypt (Gen. 46:1-4). If this is done, the chronology of this passage and Ex. 12:40 harmonizes. It is true that the Promise was first given to Abraham over 550 years before the Law was given to Moses (Gen. 12:3). But then it was repeated to Abraham several times (Gen. 13: 14-17; 15: 1-21; 17: 1-14; 22: 15-18), to Isaac his son (Gen. 26:2-4, 24), and to Jacob his grandson (Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-12; 46:1-4). The last Promise was made 430 years before the Law was given.

"*Make the promise of none effect*" - the Law could not invalidate the Promise given to Abraham and his seed (Christ).

3: 18 - "*If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise*" – the Law and Promise are contrary systems for receiving an inheritance (cf. 3: 12). The Judaizers were saying that it was all right to receive Christ by faith, but one must keep the Law to finish the transaction, or else he could not be saved. However, law-keeping is a basic change and cannot be mixed with promise-giving.

"*God gave it to Abraham by promise*" - the verb, "gave," is in the perfect tense, which guaranteed the fulfillment of the promise. The Promise that was given in the past would continue in the future. The Promise was freely given to Abraham and his seed with no requirements, and it would not be changed.

2. Purpose of the Law - 3:19-24

3:19 - "*It was added because of transgressions*" - **The Law was added.** It was added or put alongside of the original agreement (a different word than the one used in 3:15). The agreement or Promise will was not changed in any way by this addition. *Charin* can be translated to denote cause – because the transgressions were so great, they had to be restrained -- to restrain sin. The Greek word can also be translated to denote purpose – in order that sin might be manifest -- to expose sin. Either translation fits with other Scriptures. The Law restrains sin and it exposes sin.

"*Till the seed should come*" - **The Law was temporary.** The force of the Law was necessary until Christ came and then He would give deliverance.

"*It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator*" - **The Law was indirect.** It was administered by angels (Heb. 2:2; Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17) and given to Moses to be a mediator between God and Israel.

3:20 - "*A mediator*" - implies at least two parties are involved and they are not dealing directly with each other. There is a certain distance between them.

"*God is one*" - no mediator was involved in the Promise that God gave to Abraham. God spoke directly to Abraham.

3:21 - "*Is the law then against the promises of God?*" - the answer is, "No." Both the Promise and the Law come from God, but they operate for different purposes. They are not contradictory, but complementary to each other. The Law restrains man from sin and exposes him to his need of salvation. The Promise gives man confidence that he can be saved no matter how weak or poor he is.

"*If righteousness come by the law*" – this is a contrary-to-fact conditional clause. It is a hypothetical situation that is not true. The Law cannot save a man.

3:22 - "*The Scripture*" - refers to the Law of the Old Testament (Deut. 27:26 and Psalm 143:2).

"*Concluded*" –the Greek word means to shut up, to lock up in a prison. The same word is used in 3:23 and there it is translated, "shut up."

"*All under sin*" - refers to all men who are under the condemnation of sin. Such men are "locked up in a prison" by the Law.

"*That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ*" - the Law of God puts sinners under condemnation, but that condemnation prepares them to accept the Promise of God by faith. This gives sinners eternal life.

3:23 - "*Before faith came*" - life under the Law is described in 3:23-24. Life under the Promise is given in 3:25-29.

"*Were kept under the law*" - **The Law was our jailer.**

"Shut up unto the faith" - the Law guarded us and kept us in bondage until we could be handed over to faith and set free.

3:24 - *"The law was our schoolmaster"* - **The Law was our supervisor**, a "schoolmaster," not a teacher in the formal sense of the word. He was a trusted slave who trained the male children in their morals and protected them during their immature years (ages 6-16). He was a strong disciplinarian. He also brought the children safely to and from school.

"To bring us unto Christ" - the Law brings sinners to Christ for salvation by faith. **The Law is fulfilled**. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law (Mt 5:17). A believer has fulfilled the Law since he is in Christ. Christ has fulfilled it for him.

3. Position of the Believer - 3:25-29

The believer's faith gives him the position of a mature son (3:25-27) with mutual fellowship (3:28) having a magnificent inheritance (3:29).

3:25 - *"After that faith is come"* - describes life under the Promise in 3:25-29.

"No longer under a schoolmaster" - the believer in Christ has become mature and is no longer in need of the Law to supervise him. A believer is made free by Christ.

3:26 - *"Children of God"* – the Greek has "sons of God." "Children" implies immaturity, which is not the case of a believer who has received the Promise of God in Christ.

3:27 - *"Baptized into Christ"* - speaks of Spirit baptism, not water baptism (I Cor 2:13). The believers are placed in Christ by the Spirit so they benefit from all the promises given to Christ as a result.

"Have put on Christ" - put on Christ as a garment.

3:28 - *"There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* – faith in Christ does not do away with national, social or personal distinctives, but it provides mutual fellowship for all believers. Barriers between races, classes and sexes are torn down so that fellowship and respect for one another can be developed and maintained. This is possible because God impartially loves all believers.

3:29 - *"If ye be Christ's"* – this is a true-to-fact conditional clause. It could be translated, "since ye are Christ's."

"Then are ye Abraham's seed" - believers become the spiritual seed of Abraham by being in Christ.

"Heirs according to the promise" - our relationship to Christ through faith provides us access to all the blessings promised to Christ.