

LESSON FIVE (3:1-14)

By Works Or By Faith? (3:1-5)

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? 4 Did you experience so many things in vain - if it really is 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?

Using the skill of an attorney, Paul now begins the point-by-point argument section of his epistle. For two chapters Paul will pile up argument upon argument to prove that we are saved by grace, not by works of law. He will argue from Scripture, from experience, from illustrations in every day life, and even from allegory. The force of all this is nothing short of overwhelming to any who are willing to listen and reason.

V.1 O Foolish Galatians! - In a sharp style much like verse six of Chapter one, Paul calls the Galatians “mindless.”

Who Has Bewitched you - Paul used a word from the field of magic and superstition, in calling them “bewitched.” The popular belief held that the “evil eye” could cast some sort of spell on people to make them act strangely. Paul, of course, does not hold the superstition, but he is using the world’s association with ignorant superstition to shame them. He says, in effect, “Surely you were not in your right mind when you decided to give up on Jesus and his sacrifice for you”!

Before Whose Eyes Jesus Christ Was Publicly Portrayed As Crucified - The Galatians were not in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified, but Paul’s preaching was so vivid and clear that they could virtually see the whole drama unfolding. Just as in Corinth, Paul preached “Christ crucified” (I Cor. 1:23 and 2:2).

In secular Greek usage, the word for “publicly portrayed” was used for official notices and public proclamations. It had much the sense of posting on a billboard for all to see.

V. 2 Let Me Ask You Only This - Here begins the first of seven arguments which make up Chapter three. These arguments may be summarized in this way:

- (1) Law or faith: which gave you the Spirit? (vs. 2-5)
- (2) Law or faith: which makes sons of Abraham? (vs. 6-9)
- (3) Law or faith: which promises a curse? (vs. 10-14)
- (4) Example of a man’s will. (vs. 15-18)
- (5) Why was the law given, anyway? (vs. 19-20)
- (6) Is the law competing against the promises? (vs. 21-22)
- (7) Only a custodian. (vs. 23-26)

Did You Receive The Spirit By Works Of The Law? - Paul appeals to his readers’ own experiences. Did they receive the Holy Spirit when they kept God’s laws or when they accepted Christ? The answer was obvious. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord came upon selected individuals for only a short period of time, as in the example of Samson (Judges 14:6, 14:19 and 15:14). The day was yet to come when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28) to dwell within God’s child as a permanent resident.

V. 3 Are You So Foolish? - As in verse one, the word “foolish” means mindless or unthinking.

Having Begun With The Spirit - Since they began the Spiritual life in Christ, what could be gained by going back to the law? They would be reversing God’s plan, and moving backwards from spiritual maturity to infancy.

V. 4 Did You Experience So Many Things In Vain? - Was it for nothing that God had poured out His Spirit and blessings on them? Would they look at all this and then walk away?

The word “experience” may also be translated “suffer,” as in the KJV. If this is what Paul meant, then he was referring to past persecutions and hardships. Having gone through so much, would they now give it up so easily?

If It Really Is In Vain - Even in the middle of a rebuke, Paul still is hopeful of the future of his Galatian converts. Whether that hope is justified or it has all been in vain is up to the Galatians themselves.

V. 5 He Who Supplies The Spirit To You And Works Miracles - The coming of the Spirit to the Galatians was made visible by the working of miracles. It was a frequent occurrence in the early church for signs and wonders to accompany the preaching of the apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). The purpose of the miracles was to confirm what they proclaimed as true. By this proof of the Spirit’s presence, the Galatians could decide if faith in Christ was right. The confirming miracles ceased to be given when the infant church reached maturity, with the written New Testament replacing the physical presence of the apostles.

Sons of Abraham (3:6-9)

6 Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 7 So you see that it is men of faith who are the 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 men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

V. 6 Thus Abraham - Paul’s second argument is based on how a person becomes a son of Abraham. The Judaizers had probably taught that one must join Abraham in circumcision to share in the promised blessings. Paul will show, however, that Abraham is father of those who have faith, not those who are circumcised.

“Believed God, And It Was Reckoned To Him As Righteousness” - Abraham found favor in God’s eyes because of his faith. And, as Paul clearly points out in Rom. 4:10, this happened before Abraham was circumcised! When the scripture says in Gen. 15:6 that his faith was “reckoned” as righteousness, it uses a common accounting term which meant “to credit to one’s account.”

V. 8 And The Scripture, Foreseeing - Here the scripture is treated almost as a living, thinking thing. The idea behind these words is probably that the Holy Spirit, who authored the scripture, foresaw what was coming.

That God Would Justify The Gentiles By Faith - God’s plan has not changed. The gospel of grace through Jesus Christ was the intended means of salvation from the very beginning. This thought will be developed further in verses 15 to 17.

Abraham - The “good news” of the coming Savior was included in compact form in the promises to Abraham. Few details were given, but there was enough substance for people to put their faith in.

“In You Shall All The Nations Be Blessed.” - The promise was first made to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 and is repeated several times in similar words (15:5; 17:4-5; 18:18; 22:17). The Jews thought that the Gentiles would first have to be circumcised to become Abraham’s sons. God had other plans.

V. 9 So Then, Those Who Are Men Of Faith - It is clear from Paul’s argument, that we become partners with Abraham by joining him in his kind of faith. It might be well to remind ourselves what kind of faith that was.

Blessed With Abraham Who Had Faith - The fulfillment of God’s promise of blessing all nations is made possible through faith. Men do not have to become Jews first. Men of any nationality may approach God on the same basis as Abraham - faith. Furthermore, the promise is

only to those of all nations who do have this faith. All men, of whatever nation, who do not have faith are condemned (John 3:18).

The Curse Of The Law (3:10-14)

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them." 11 Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; 12 but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does 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 be every one who hangs on a tree" - 14 that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

V. 10 For All Who Rely On Works Of The Law - Just as in 2:16, Paul omits the definite article and says simply "works of law." All people who approach God on the basis of legalism are in trouble, regardless of which legal code or law they have tried to keep. The specific failure of the Jews and the Mosaic Law is typical of all men and all legal codes. If anyone tries to make a lawbook out of the New Testament they will likewise fail to live up to its demands.

Are Under A Curse - The Old Testament itself will provide proof of the constant peril of those who try to justify themselves before God by works of law. The curse is promised within the Law itself.

For It Is Written - Just as Moses charged the people in Deut. 27:26, the man who does not do what the law says is accursed. To this the people replied, "Amen." Paul adds the word "all" to make it even more emphatic that anyone who fails to keep any commandment of the law is doomed. This is the promise of the law!

V. 11 Now It Is Evident - Paul now brings in a scripture statement from Hab. 2:4 to clinch his argument. Here God has clearly said that those who are justified by *faith* will live. While the Law brought constant peril, faith brings constant promise.

The Law: "Do it all, or die!"

Faith: "Believe in me, and live!"

Every man must choose the avenue by which he approaches God. He can choose the peril of legalism or the promise of faith, but not both at the same time.

V. 12 - But The Law Does Not Rest On Faith - It is necessary to show that law and faith are not compatible. God promised to give justification to those who have faith, but the law says they have to earn it. Thus the Law is not content to stand on the promises, but rushes out to attain self-justification.

"He Who Does Them Shall Live By Them." - This passage from Lev. 18:5 points out the requirement of the Law. Despite the promise that "He who through faith is righteous shall live," the Law says the only way to live is by doing the works.

V. 13 Christ Redeemed Us From The Curse Of The Law - All men under law are under a curse. This was especially true of the Jews, who had the most complete revelation of God's law. With all mankind in this predicament, Jesus came to our rescue! Men were trapped under the law's curse by their own admitted inability to keep all the law. So, just like the man who purchases the freedom of a slave, Christ "redeemed" us. The word "redeemed" actually means "to buy or buy back, at personal expense." The Law demanded death as the penalty for our sins, and Christ offered himself as the payment.

Having Become A Curse For Us - The only one who had never known sin in Himself was made to be sin for our sake (II Cor. 5:21). The Old Testament also supports the association of Christ's death with the curse, in the text from Deut. 21:23, which Paul here quotes. It is also in the light of this curse that we should understand God turning away from His Son during the climax of the crucifixion (Matt. 27:46). The awfulness of that physical death was far surpassed by death of spiritual separation. Such was the cost of Calvary.

“Cursed By Every One Who Hangs On A Tree” - The practice of crucifixion was not Jewish. However, the Jews did take the bodies of executed criminals and hang them on trees as a mark of public shame. The grisly spectacle of nailing the living to a stake or cross, and then watching them die, was yet to be developed after the time of Moses and Deut. 21:23. Crucifixion in ancient Greece and Carthage was done on a simple wooden stake. Later crucifixion added the cross beam. The Romans adopted this form of crucifixion, using it only in the punishment of slaves for very serious crimes. It was the supposed treason of Jesus against the state of Rome which made him eligible for this death. (See John 19:12-16).

V. 14 That In Christ Jesus - This is a purpose phrase, indicating the purpose of the cross.

The Blessing Of Abraham - Abraham’s blessing was to be counted as righteous by God. This same blessing was made possible to all men by what Jesus did on the cross.

Might Come Upon The Gentiles - Thus the Gentiles have joined Father Abraham. They are accepted to share his blessing on the basis of faith, not on the basis of nationality or proselyte circumcision as the Jews had supposed.

That We Might Receive The Promise Of The Spirit Through Faith - This verse ties together the first three arguments of this chapter. (See comments on verse two for complete list.) The promised *Spirit* is given to sons of *Abraham* on the basis of *faith*, not law. This truth was crucial to correcting the problem of legalism in Galatia.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Paul call the Galatians “foolish” and even “bewitched”?
2. Had they seen the crucifixion of Jesus?
3. What is the argument of the first five verses?
4. How would they have known when it was that they received the Spirit?
5. Why don’t we have the same miracles?
6. What did Abraham do in Gen. 15:6 that caused God to pronounce him righteous?
7. In what sense did the gospel exist even in the time of Abraham?
8. Why, specifically, does the law bring a curse over our heads?
9. In what way did the form of Jesus’ execution connect him with the curse?

10. What does “redeem” mean?
11. How would you summarize the three arguments of this lesson?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the main point that Paul is trying to prove in chapters 3 and 4?
2. Discuss the meaning of the term “bewitched” and the belief behind the “evil eye.”
3. How was the Greek word for “publicly portrayed” used in the secular world?
4. List and memorize, in the proper order, the 7 arguments which make up chapter three.
5. Explain the argument “Law or faith: which gave you the Spirit?”
6. What was the purpose of “signs and wonders” accompanying the preaching of the Apostles?
7. In the Book of Acts, Peter and Paul were able to raise the dead (Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12). Why don't we have these same miracles performed today?
8. Explain the argument “Law or faith: which makes sons of Abraham?”
9. What is the meaning of the word “reckoned”?
10. In what way was the Gospel preached to Abraham?
11. What promise was made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3?
12. What does John 3:18 teach about anyone who does not have faith in Jesus?
13. Explain the argument “Law or faith: which promises a curse?”
14. What is the warning recorded in Deuteronomy 27:26?
15. What promise is recorded in Habakkuk 2:4?
16. “While the law brought constant _____, faith brings constant _____.”

17. What is the message of Leviticus 18:5?
18. Define the word “redeemed.”
19. What does 2 Cor. 5:21 teach about Jesus becoming a curse for us?
20. What curse is recorded in Deuteronomy 21:23?
21. Provide a brief history of the development of crucifixion.
22. “The promised _____ is given to sons of _____ on the basis of _____, not _____.”