

Galatians 3 • The Law & Grace, Part I

Introduction

In chapter 3-4 of Galatians, Paul provides the doctrinal foundation explaining the relationship between the Law and grace. He provides six specific arguments – three in each chapter – in an effort to prove that salvation comes by grace, through faith, and apart from the works of the Law. It's important to pay attention to three recurring words throughout: “faith”, “law”, and “promise”. If we can fully grasp and put into practice Paul's teaching here, no one will ever be able to mislead us by any of the myriad of false teachings which attempt to blur the distinct biblical lines between the Law and grace.

¹You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ²This 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? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

[Read v.1-5]

Background: Bear in mind that Paul is having to fix problems introduced by Judaizers who came along **AFTER** the Galatians accepted the Gospel preached by Paul, claiming that what Paul preached was not enough where salvation is concerned. These false teachers' claim was that a person had to become a Jew first – obedient to the Old Testament Law the same way as any religious Jew – before they could continue on to becoming a Christian.

Q: Since the very definition of salvation is being challenged, where does Paul begin his response? With whose experience does he begin?

A: Paul begins with the Galatians' own personal experience with Christ. This is actually the best evidence of how God works.

Q: What Gospel message did Paul originally preach to the Galatians?

A: Paul preached Christ crucified, something he immediately reminds them of in v.1.

Q: What point of contention is Paul emphatic as not being part of the original Gospel message accepted by the Galatians?

A: The “works of the Law”.

Point: Those espousing the “works of the Law” were actually incorrectly interpreting the Old Testament Law to begin with! This phrase indicates that the Judaizers thought one obtained salvation by being obedient to the rules, rituals, festivals, and such of the Law rather than the greater Person of God who gave the Law. It was a type of replacement theology in which obedience from the heart gave way to obedience of the hands, or deeds, so to speak.

Q: Each covenant in the Old Testament was accompanied by a sign, such as circumcision for the Abrahamic covenant and the Sabbath for the Mosaic covenant. What was the accompanying, confirming sign which the Galatians' experienced when they received Paul's Gospel message?

A: They received the Holy Spirit as evidence of salvation.

Q: What “works of the Law” did the Galatians do in order to receive the confirming sign of the Holy Spirit?

A: Trick question – none. Paul's point is that it wasn't accomplished “by the flesh” but by “hearing with faith” — **NOT** obedience to some law.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:13-14

Q: Why does Paul call this whole notion of works “foolish”?

A: Having already experienced true salvation “by hearing with faith”, it’s not logical to allow someone to come along afterwards to challenge that personal experience as somehow lacking or needing something additional.

Q: What was even further evidence substantiating that the Gospel message accepted through Paul was whole and complete and not in need of anything else?

A: Not only was the Holy Spirit provided, but miracles had been performed among them. In point of fact, these were things that never accompanied a conversion to Judaism or its pursuit of “works of the Law”.

Point: Re-read v.3. There are those today who feel that the same Spirit who saved them is not able to keep them or help them live for Christ, people who know intellectually that salvation comes by grace, but in daily practice depend on their own strength to be a Christian.

Application: Paul begins with a personal argument to prove that salvation is by grace, through faith, apart from the works of the Law. How is this confirmed in your own salvation experience? Do you think you did something to earn or accomplish it? How well do you recognize that what began by faith needs to daily continue in faith?

[Read v.6-14]

⁶Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

⁷Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” ⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

¹⁰For 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.”

¹¹Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

¹²However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.” ¹³Christ 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”—¹⁴in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Q: If the previous section can be termed a “personal argument”, what kind of argument is Paul making in this section for the issue of the Law and grace?

A: It’s a scriptural argument. He’s specifically using the Law to show that the Judaizers are themselves misinterpreting the Law.

Q: What is the first Old Testament point provided in v.6-7 which quote Genesis 15:6?

A: Paul agrees with the Judaizers when they point to Abraham, “father of the Jews”, as their example. However, Paul substantiates that Abraham’s own salvation came about by faith. The Law which Judaizers now claim is somehow necessary, wouldn’t be available until hundreds of years after Abraham’s death!

Point: All who trust Christ are, indeed, children of Abraham, the father of BELIEVING, not DOING some point of the Law. (See Romans 1:4-8)

Q: What is the Old Testament point provided in v.8-9 which quote Genesis 12:3?

A: God promised salvation would come to ALL nations through Abraham, not just the Jews. Nowhere in the promise to Abraham does it even hint that anyone will have to first become a Jew.

Point: Abraham’s being saved by faith serves as the model for everyone to follow – Jew and Gentile alike – that salvation is based on faith.

Q: What term does Paul use to describe the message which Abraham personally accepted?

A: “The gospel”. (v.8).

Point: *It was obviously not the Gospel of the grace of God preached today, but the good news that God would bless Abraham and make him a mighty nation, this promise being accepted on Abraham's part by faith and accounting for righteousness. It's a very powerful proof of the working of salvation "by hearing with faith" (v.2)*

Q: What does the Old Testament itself testify about in v.10 which quotes Deuteronomy 27:26?

A: The Law in and of itself does not render salvation, but brings awareness of a curse in man's inability to keep the whole Law.

Q: How does the Old Testament testify that salvation is accomplished in 11 which quotes Habakkuk 2:4?

A: "The righteous man will live by faith."

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Romans 1:17

*BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;
AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.
Hebrews 10:38*

Q: How does the Old Testament sum up this paradox of how the Law actually works in v.12 which quotes Leviticus 18:5?

A: There is a vast difference between "doing" and "believing".

Point: *No one has ever been saved by doing the Law because no one can ever fully obey the Law.*

Q: How were all these points proved in Christ's very life in v.13-14 which quotes Deuteronomy 21:23?

A: Christ died on a tree – the cross – and fulfilled the Law given in Deuteronomy. In fact, He fulfilled the whole Law.

Point: *The Law puts us under a curse, but Christ died to remove that curse. Because He has taken our curse upon Himself, we are free to live in Christ. Therefore the blessing God promised through Abraham is available to **everyone** – the Gentiles included – by **faith**.*

Application: *Some Old Testament traditions are continued by various non-Jewish groups or individuals such as observing the Sabbath, circumcision, etc. How is it wrong to make any of these things a **requirement** for one's Christianity? What things might you be clinging to as having to be personally performed in order to keep you in a right standing with God which, in reality, are fulfilled by faith?*

¹⁵Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. ¹⁶Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. ¹⁷What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

¹⁹Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. ²⁰Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

[Read v.15-18]

Q: What kind of argument is Paul making in this last section of chapter 3?

A: It's a logical argument. He's applying common sense to show that Scripture does not contradict itself – it takes a human to do that.

Q: What is Paul's point about the covenant between Abraham and God? What would be the logical end of the Judaizers' argument in favor of the Mosaic Law?

A: Comparing it to a human contract, Paul affirms that in the same way it is illegal for a third party to step in and change or cancel it. God made a contract with Abraham 430 years before the Law was given, so the Law of Moses could never cancel out God's original promise to Abraham.

Point: *It's not logical to propose that the Mosaic Law was a new way of salvation cancelling out God's promise to Abraham. Promise and faith go together, never promise and the Law.*

Observation: *This leaves open the question, "They why did God even GIVE the Law?", which he answers in the rest of this chapter.*

[Read v.19-20]

Q: Did God ever give the Law to the Gentiles?

A: No, it was given to the Jews alone. All the Gentiles had was moral law written instinctively on their hearts.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

Romans 2:14

Q: What is the key word Paul uses in v.19 to describe why the Law was given to the Jews alone?

A: "Added". In other words, it was not a replacement for the Abrahamic promises, but an addition to it.

Q: What here indicates that the Law was only a temporary addition and not a permanent one?

A: "Until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made." Once Christ the Seed came, the Law was superseded and the promise to Abraham fulfilled.

Q: What is Paul's point in v.20 about the true role of a mediator?

A: Whereas the Law was given by angelic mediators, God spoke personally with Abraham. God is one, so the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham depended on Him alone.

Point: *The Law was temporary and intended only for Israel.*

²¹Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²²But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

[Read v.21-22]

Q: If there was a law or set of laws that could save a sinner, why would there be a need for Jesus to die on the cross?

A: There wouldn't. God could have spared His Son and simply used the Law instead of the cross.

Q: So why is the Law not contrary to God's promises?

A: By revealing sin, the Law forces the sinner to trust in God's promises, to trust in Him to whom the Law actually points.

Point: *The Law reveals our desperate need for God's grace, the working of which enables us to please God through faith.*

Q: So what is actually the good news that the purpose of the Law is to place everyone under sin?

A: That means that **everyone** can be saved by grace.

Point: *If God allowed even a single sinner to be saved by the Law, then no one could be saved by grace. Everyone must be saved the same way.*

[Read v.23-29]

Q: What was the role of a tutor in the ancient world? How did that work?

A: The tutor used to guard and teach minor children until they reached legal adulthood, at which time the children were on their own.

Point: *The Law kept the Jews "in line", so to speak, until Christ came and the revelation of the Gospel was given to both the Jews and Gentiles.*

Q: What is significant in Paul's reference to baptism as it pertains to the overall issue of grace and the Law being discussed?

A: We are not baptized into the Law, but "into Christ". Therefore from that point on we no longer are clothed – a biblical expression of obedience – with the Law but Christ.

Q: What is the ground-breaking revelation provided in v.28-29 regarding the working of grace?

A: It's not limited to just the tension between Jew and Gentile, but eradicates all social, racial, economic, and gender barriers. It's literally available to **ALL**.

Overall Application

Q: What is wrong with the notion that today's Jews are worshiping the same God of the Bible as we are, so they don't really need to be converted to Christianity?

A: Salvation does not come by the Law, but by the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. No matter how devoted someone might be to the Old Testament, they need to receive the Gospel of Christ in order to complete that work.

Q: What is wrong with the notion that today's Christians HAVE to keep the Sabbath, or observe Old Testament dietary laws, or observe ANY of the rituals or practices associated with it?

A: It becomes a teaching that salvation is not complete without "works of the Law", without doing something to earn it. It replaces the work of God's grace with a false gospel.

Q: How are you continuing to daily live in the same manner of faith and grace which you initially experienced when you first came to Christ?

²³But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.