

GALATIANS

Lesson 7

Faith from Start to Finish Galatians 3:1-9

INTRODUCTION

Do you often find your Christian life a burden rather than a blessing? There may be a definite reason for this. You may have fallen into a legalistic spirit about Christian living.

There are many Christians who begin their spiritual lives by faith in Christ but after awhile they fall into a legalistic spirit, living in the power of the flesh rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. They begin well and are very excited about Christianity, but then they fall into legalism, self-effort and a critical spirit, making the Christian life a burden rather than a blessing. What is their problem? They have never really understood that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. They have had wrong teaching from the beginning about salvation; consequently, they fail to trust Christ in daily living as they trusted Christ for initial salvation.

The Apostle Paul has told us many times in this book that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. If a person has salvation, it has been given to him by a sovereign and gracious God and it was not received by any human effort, acts, works or merit. Since salvation is by grace, all a person can do is receive it through faith. Faith is believing the promise of God. When God gives a person the gift of salvation in Christ, all anyone can do is believe the promise of God and receive Jesus Christ into his life. Faith is consistent with grace and grace is consistent with faith.

If I want to give you my Bible as a gift, I give it to you freely without any strings attached. A gift is given unconditionally and if any conditions are attached it is not a gift. If a person asks for the gift or pays for the gift, it is not a gift. All any one can do is receive the gift when it is given and say, "Thank you." God gives men and women the gift of salvation in Christ and all any man can do is receive the gift by faith and say, "Thank you."

The issue in Galatians 3:1-9 is faith verses works. It is interesting to note that the noun "faith" or the verb "to believe" occurs six times in this section of scripture. Paul's emphasis is upon faith, not works.

BEWITCHED ABOUT THE TRUTH 3:1

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"

The Galatians were spiritually stupid because they were going after the teaching of the Judaizers who taught that men had to keep the law to be saved and that works were necessary to obtain salvation. These Galatians were stupid and unreflecting because they were turning from the truth that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. The Judaizers had "bewitched" them or "cast a magic spell over them" so as to cause them to leave grace for law and faith for works in salvation.

The singular "who" may suggest that behind the false teaching of the Judaizers was the work of the devil, who is the father of lies (John 8:44 **"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies"**), and the biggest lie of all is that men can be saved by law/works. The devil is constantly trying to get men away from the simplicity of the gospel (2 Cor.11:3 **"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere [simple] and pure devotion to Christ."**) Faith in Christ is so simple a child can do it, for faith is consistent with grace.

"Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified."

Jesus Christ and Him crucified was publicly portrayed to the Galatians by Paul. Paul publicly proclaimed the death of Christ to these Galatians and they knew the truth, but they were turning from it. They understood that Christ in His death secured their salvation, and they should have realized all they could to make salvation a reality was to believe in Christ. To add anything to salvation is an offense to the finished work of Christ.

This verse tells us something about the gospel. The gospel is a proclamation or an announcement of truth. It is to announce that Jesus Christ made a perfect and complete atonement for sin and sinners, and the benefits of His death are forever fresh, valid available. Sinners may be justified (declared righteous) before God, not by any human works but through faith in the crucified Christ for sin.

The gospel is not good advice to men but good news about Christ; not an appeal for men to do something, but a declaration of what God has done in Christ. It is not a demand but an offer of salvation to all who will receive it.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GALATIANS PROVES THE TRUTH OF JUSTIFICATION 3:2-5

“I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?”

Paul now argues with the Galatians about the initial reception of the Holy Spirit into their lives. Did the permanent indwelling of the Spirit come from the works of the law or from faith in Christ? The Holy Spirit came the moment they received Christ. What place did the Galatians play in this process? How did they receive the Spirit and begin their Christian lives? Through a once and for all act of faith in Christ, they received the Holy Spirit.

Faith in Christ results in justification and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Every one who is justified receives the Spirit and everyone who receives the Spirit is justified. This puts an end to the false teaching that salvation is in two stages. Some say that a person is justified when he initially receives Christ but he must receive the Holy Spirit at a later time in the Christian life. Paul says that justification and the coming of the Spirit occur when a person trusts in Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. Paul’s whole point is that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit by an act of faith not by the works of the law.

“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

Now Paul gives a second argument from sanctification or God working in the Christian. He is talking about attaining maturity in the Christian life through law/works or grace through faith. Is a Christian’s experiential or progressive sanctification the result of the Holy Spirit or the works of the law? It is the Holy Spirit who gives the divine enablement or power to push on into maturity in the Christian life. Sanctification, like justification, is appropriated by faith and the Holy Spirit gives the power to do good works. The Galatians, however, were beginning to depend upon self-effort and legalism for their sanctification rather than the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.

Paul is not denying the necessity of spiritual works in the life of a Christian. Works in the Christian life prove, demonstrate and give evidence that one is truly saved. Works are essential to prove the reality of salvation but are not necessary to obtain salvation. Good works are never the cause of salvation but are the fruit or result of salvation. Christians do not work to get saved or to keep themselves saved but they work because they are saved.

Because the Christian is a new creation in Christ, he has new desires for holiness of life and he has a new power in the Holy Spirit to live a godly life. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Christian to give new desires and new motivations. The Spirit also convicts the Christian about operating daily on faith so as to produce good works which will honor and glorify God.

The good works a Christian does spring from the motivation to please God through faith. A Christian pleases God not to get acceptance with God—that is a given fact because of Christ’s work—but

to honor God out of love with a desire to live Christlike. The motivation for the Christian's good works is love for God through faith, and when we operate by faith, the result is always spiritual good works.

What then is faith? Faith is believing God and His Word, the Bible, which includes the commands and principles of scripture plus the examples in scripture of holy living. Faith believes God and acts in obedience. It is impossible to have faith and not act. True faith always results in action (obedience). Yet it is possible to act and not have faith. When we act apart from faith, we are motivated by the flesh (self-life.) The self-life can never glorify God. We began the Christian life by faith and we continue it by faith and faith always results in obedience.

“Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing?”

Paul now argues from their experience of persecution. The Galatians had at one time suffered much for their convictions that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ alone. To turn back from grace and follow legalism would make their suffering for the truth worthless. NOTE. Most of us cannot appreciate this argument because we are not suffering for our faith in Christ. We may appreciate this verse more in the future when persecution will be a reality for American Christians.

“Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”

Paul's fourth argument to show that the Galatians were saved by faith is that of the gifts of the Spirit. The Galatians had been granted miraculous spiritual gifts like prophecy, tongues and healing. Did they receive these gifts by works or by faith? Obviously by faith for they were given these the moment they trusted in Jesus Christ.

Paul's whole point in these four arguments is that men begin their salvation by faith and it is ridiculous to think they can continue it by works of the flesh. Having begun with the gospel, one must never go back to law-works for salvation. To do so would not be an improvement but a degeneration.

Notice that Paul expected miracles to happen as a result of the Holy Spirit's work. The supernatural was a reality for the early church and it should be for us as well.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ABRAHAM PROVES THE TRUTH OF JUSTIFICATION 3:6-9

“Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.’“

Paul now takes a more doctrinal approach to salvation by faith in Christ and will use the illustration of Abraham who was the founder of the Jewish race. The Judaizers looked to Moses as their leader and taught that one had to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. The Judaizers especially emphasized that circumcision was necessary for a right relationship with God. Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6. Abraham who was old and childless believed God's promise that he would have a son. When he believed God, his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. The word “credited” is a business term; it means “to put to one's account” or “to place on deposit.” Abraham believed God and his act of faith was placed to his account in value as righteousness. He believed God and his act of faith was placed on deposit for him and evaluated as righteousness.

Abraham believed God and he was justified or declared righteous before God. Abraham was justified many years before he was circumcised and hundreds of years before the law was given. He was not justified because he had done anything to deserve it but because he believed God.

Let us begin with Abraham and learn how this friend of God was justified and saved. Not because he left his country, his relatives, his father's house; not because he was circumcised; not because he stood ready to sacrifice his own son, Isaac in whom he had the promise of posterity. Abraham was justified because he believed. (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*)

Saints in the Old Testament like saints in the New Testament were saved by grace through faith apart from any human works. Old Testament saints believed in God's promises which included the promise

of Christ to come. New Testament saints believe in God's promises which are based on Christ who has already come.

“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”

All who exercise faith in Christ are spiritual children of Abraham (not physical children) because they all exercised faith as did Abraham to be justified. Abraham is the spiritual father of all true believers, and all who believe whether Jews or Gentiles are spiritual seed of Abraham.

“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Paul goes back to the Abrahamic Covenant to prove his point. In Genesis 12:3 when God made a covenant with Abraham, He promised that in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. This is the universal promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that all who trust in Messiah, whether Jew or Gentile, shall be justified. It is through the gospel message that all Gentile nations have been blessed through God's dealings with Abraham, for the Messiah came through Abraham and his seed (posterity, children).

The blessing for the Gentiles was and is the message of justification for all who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Judaizers said that Gentiles had to become Jews by circumcision and law-keeping before they could be saved, but Paul said that the Galatians were already sons of Abraham, not by circumcision or the law, but by faith.

“So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Every Gentile who exercises faith in Christ as did Abraham is blessed with Abraham in the sense that he or she is justified before God. God declares men righteous because they are depending upon Christ for deliverance from sin and a right standing before God rather than upon self-effort or good works.

CONCLUSION

Why was Abraham blessed by God? Because he believed God's promise and was declared righteous before God. All he did was believe and God saved him. Abraham cast off all dependence upon good works as a means of finding acceptance with God and received God's way of bestowing salvation which is salvation by grace through faith in God's promise. Have you believed God's promise of salvation in Christ? God says, **“He that has the Son (Jesus Christ) has life and he that has not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God is continually abiding upon him”** (John 3:36).

The gospel offers you blessing, my friend. What must you do to receive this blessing? The answer is nothing. You do not have to do anything. You only have to believe. You cannot work for your salvation. You can only believe that God has already provided salvation for you in Christ, and you must believe God's promise that it is so. Salvation begins by faith and Christianity is lived by faith. Salvation is by faith from start to finish. Have you yet started your spiritual life by trusting in Jesus Christ? You cannot receive the blessing of justification apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.