

Bible Study

September 16 2020

(Lesson 1) Live by Faith Galatians 3:1-22 Unit

Theme: The Gospel in Galatians

Central Truth: Christians are called to live by faith in Christ.

Focus: Explore and proclaim the necessity of continuously living by faith in Christ.

Context: The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians around AD 52.

Golden Text: "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11).

Study Outline:

- I. Receive the Spirit by Faith (Gal. 3:1-9)
- II. Reject Reliance on the Law (Gal. 3:10-14)
- III. Receive God's Promise by Faith (Gal. 3:15-22)

INTRODUCTION

In Galatians 1-2, Paul exposes the false teachers who were in Galatia and defends his position as a minister and apostle. His task in chapter 3 is to expose the fallacies of their heresy. Paul also discusses the manner in which the Galatian believers have been deceived into believing the false doctrine.

It is not sufficient to merely debate doctrine on paper. The greater task is to undo the effects heresy has had on the lives of believers. False teaching can destroy families, ruin lives, and split churches. It can leave people believing they must work their way to heaven or that they do not have enough faith to please God.

Paul's twofold task in Galatians 3 is to expose heresy and convince the Galatians they must turn once again to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a tremendous undertaking, but Paul states his position clearly and effectively. He tells them what they should believe and urges them to believe it.

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I. RECEIVE THE SPIRIT BY FAITH (Gal. 3:1-9)

A. Foolishness of Disobedience (v. 1) 1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Paul begins this chapter by identifying one of the primary marks of false teaching: those who believe it become “foolish.” Foolish comes from a Greek word which literally means “without wisdom or thinking.” It means the Galatian believers had acted without clearly considering the results of their actions. They had acted without wisdom or spiritual discernment.

Paul identifies the nature of their foolishness with the word bewitched. In other words, the Galatians had been swayed by these false teachers. As a result they were acting unreasonably. They had allowed themselves to be mesmerized by these influential teachers.

The essential truth about their action was that they were disobedient to God. This is conveyed in the phrase “that ye should not obey the truth.” Despite the wooing of the teachers, the Galatians were still responsible for their actions. They had been disobedient. There was no excuse. They had failed to preserve the truth of the Gospel in their lives.

As Christians today, we must guard against the charisma of false teachers because nothing will relieve us from our responsibility to remain obedient to God. We must not be taken in by a smooth delivery. Regardless of circumstances, the verdict upon anyone who is disobedient to the truth of the Gospel is “foolish.” This should cause us to guard ourselves against any teacher or doctrine that does not reflect the Biblical message of Christ.

- What “bewitches” some believers today? “No one statement wrested from its context is a sufficient war- rant for actions that plainly controvert other commands. . . . Every false teacher who has divided the church has had ‘it is written’ on which to hang his doctrine.” —G. Campbell Morgan

B. Law and Flesh, or Faith and Spirit (vv. 2-5) 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

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4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. 5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Paul identifies the basic problem of the Galatians: they had moved from a life committed to faith and the Spirit unto a life of bondage to the Law and the works of the flesh. In dealing with this problem, he asks them a series of questions to probe the nature of their current walk with Christ.

Verse 2 is the basic question from which all the other questions come. Paul asks, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (NASB). If their receiving of the Spirit had been by works, then they would have earned it through their keeping of the Law. But if it was by faith, then they had received Him in spite of their failure to keep the Law and only because of their faith and trust in Christ.

“Works of the law” clearly identifies the nature of the heresy they were believing. They followed religious and traditional observances in an effort to keep the commands of the Law. They were endeavouring to find favour with God based on their ability to keep commandments.

“Hearing of faith,” on the other hand, identifies the nature of the Gospel which Paul preached—the message the Galatians believed when they first became Christians. Salvation was freely given to the Galatians and was not earned by them. Faith opened the door of their heart to receive God’s salvation and apply it to their life. Paul knew their initial experience had been genuine, and he appealed to it.

The Galatian Christians had risked much and suffered much by becoming followers of Christ (v. 4). By dropping back into trying to be righteous by keeping the Law, they had suffered for no reason. They had even witnessed miracles, which were a product of faith, not the Law (v. 5). Why would they foolishly try to be “perfect[ed] by the flesh” (v. 3), which was impossible?

1. What does Paul call “foolish” (v. 3)?
2. Answer the question in verse 5. “I believe though I do not comprehend, and I hold by faith what I cannot grasp with the mind.” —Bernard of Clairvaux

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C. Example of Abraham (vv. 6-9)

6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

The false teachers at Galatia were evidently Judaizers who endeavoured to make Jewish law and tradition requirements for salvation. Paul uses the father of the Israelite nation, Abraham, as an example of the priority of faith.

Before the Law was written, Abraham was found faithful before God. Without the Law he was able to find favour with God through a life of faith. In pointing this out, Paul demonstrates that the Law is not higher than the need for faith. The priority lies with faith as opposed to observance of rules and regulations.

This did not negate the importance of the Law, nor its proper function, which Paul will clarify later. However, the Galatians were using the Law for something it was not intended to do—save humankind. This could only be accomplished through a life of faith in Christ.

1. Who are “the children of Abraham” (v. 7)?
2. Explain God’s promise about the nations (v. 8).

“Faith and works are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God trusts God; and he that trusts God obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith.”—Charles Spurgeon

II. REJECT RELIANCE ON THE LAW (Gal. 3:10-14) A. Curse of the Law (v. 10) 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Paul poses the problem of the Law’s demand for perfection. For anyone to live by the Law, he or she had to live by it perfectly. No one except Christ has been able to do this. With this in mind, Paul proceeds to apply the verdict that rests on everyone.

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Since none of us have been able to keep every part of the Law perfectly, we are “cursed.” Cursed comes from a Greek word which means “to set forth unto the judgment of God.” Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26, which declares that a curse falls on anyone who is not able to keep all of the Law.

In highlighting this judgment, Paul is noting that keeping the Law perfectly is impossible. As a result, we are under God’s judgment for what we have not kept, no matter how small the offense may have been. With this in mind, Paul proceeds to explain what can be done with the curse.

Who is “cursed,” and why?

“You cannot make men good by law.”—C. S. Lewis

B. Justification by Faith (vv. 11-12)

¹¹ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. ¹² And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

The only answer for the curse brought on by disobedience is faith in Christ. To make this point, Paul declares the obvious conclusion of our inability to keep the Law perfectly—we are not justified by God through the Law.

Paul then shifts from the problem of judgment to the solution of faith. He declares the answer, “The just shall live by faith” (v. 11). He is quoting from Habakkuk 2:4. The fact that he does not preface the quotation with words such as “As it is written” indicates the quotation was probably familiar to the Galatians. It is truth they should have known and maintained.

The principle Paul quotes shows the vital connection between righteousness and faith. One abides with the other—they are inseparable. When we put our faith in Christ, we are then made righteous. It is a gift from God. However, righteousness is also the fruit of a life of faith.

Verse 12 highlights the division between the Law and faith. No one can receive salvation by doing the works of the Law. We cannot depend on works and claim to live by faith. The person depending on the works of the Law is not made righteous by the Law. Dependence on the Law brings the curse of God. However, the life of faith brings righteousness.

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- What does it mean to “live by faith” (v. 11)?
 “Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the individual precepts of an external law code; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit’s producing His fruit in the life, reproducing those graces which were seen in perfection in the life of Christ.” —F. F. Bruce

C. Redemption From the Curse (vv. 13-14)

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In verse 13, Paul presents the answer to the curse of the Law. Christ’s work on Calvary satisfied the demand the Law placed on sinful people. Christ was able to redeem us by “being made a curse for us.” His work was a substitutionary one. He took our curse upon Himself.

Jesus, having borne the burden of the curse of our sin, made our redemption possible. Redeemed comes from a Greek term that was frequently used for the purchase of slaves. Christ purchased us out of the bondage of sin. He removed us from the curse of God’s judgment. He bore our punishment by taking it on Himself.

Having given the solution to the curse of sin, Paul shows the blessing the believer receives as a result (v. 14). He describes the blessing with two phrases: “the blessing of Abraham” and “the promise of the Spirit.” Both of these are received through faith in Christ. They are related but emphasize different aspects of the Christian’s new life in Christ. “The blessing of Abraham” refers to having righteousness credited to us through faith in God. “The promise of the Spirit” emphasizes the new life we receive through the power of the Spirit once we trust in Christ. Faith in Christ and His work brings us the blessings of justification and new life.

- What did Jesus Christ do for us (v.13), and what is the result (v.14)?

“In both its precepts and penalty, the law of God in its most exacting requirements was fulfilled by Jesus. And He did this in our place as our representative and our substitute.” —Jerry Bridges

III. RECEIVE GOD’S PROMISE BY FAITH (Gal. 3:15-22)

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A. Inheritance by Promise (vv. 15-18) (Galatians 3:15-17 is not included in the printed text.) ¹⁸ **For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.**

Paul confirms that the inheritance of Abraham did not come by works. Abraham received the promise before the Law was even in existence; and although Paul does not mention it here, neither had circumcision been commanded yet. When the covenant and promise were initially given to Abraham, all that existed between him and God was the promise of God.

The essential matter is that God made the promise and fulfilled it. Abraham accepted it by faith and remained faithful to God.

The inheritance of Abraham is described in its most basic form in Genesis 12:1-3. In this all-important event, God promised Abraham: (1) guidance; (2) divine action in his life and his descendants' lives; (3) blessing upon his influence; (4) divine favour for those who would bless him, and a curse on those who would curse him; and (5) other nations would receive divine blessing through him. Throughout the rest of Abraham's life, this fivefold inheritance was showered upon him and he was challenged to remain faithful to God's promise.

Paul points out that the inheritance was given by promise to Abraham, not by works—not even by works of the Law. The word gave in verse 18 of the text means “to give benevolently or out of grace.” The inheritance came to Abraham in a benevolent act of grace.

Further, Paul says it was given graciously “by promise.” Promise in contemporary English indicates a pledge of good intention. However, the Greek term does not mean a “potential hope”; rather, it is an announcement of an event to come, a declaration. God's promise to Abraham, then, was an announcement of what He was actually giving to Abraham.

As believers, we should not look at the work of Christ and its application to our life as a mere potential. It is an accomplished work by Christ, accepted by faith and not of works. We do not create our salvation by our works; our salvation is already accomplished. It is applied once we repent of our sin and submit to Christ.

The inheritance promised to Abraham was likewise graciously given. To confirm its application, he had to remain faithful to God. The acts of Abraham were marks of his

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faithfulness, but in no way did his acts earn the inheritance for him. “Faith rests on the naked Word of God; that Word believed gives full assurance.” —Harry Ironside

B. The Law and the Mediator (vv. 19-20) ¹⁹ Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. ²⁰ Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

After removing the Law as the source of salvation, Paul tells the Galatians what the purpose of the Law really was. It was given because of the transgressions of men and women. The Law was to identify transgressions for what they were. There were elements in the Law to handle human guilt, but these were only shadows of the complete work to be done in Christ.

Paul’s reference to the “seed” (v. 19) is to Christ. He is the One through whom the fullness of the Abrahamic covenant was realized. Christ became the perfect “mediator” through whom all might be joint-heirs of the promise of God.

In verse 19 we see that angels were involved in the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The particular way they were involved is not described, but along with the lightning and thunder, there was angelic involvement.

The two uses of “one” in verse 20 indicate that (1) no one can mediate for himself and (2) only God can stand for Himself. He is the only perfect mediator for us.

Why is Jesus called “the seed” (v. 19)?

C. Righteousness by Faith (vv. 21-22) ²¹ Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. ²² But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Paul here describes the manner in which the Law related to the promises of God. It was to make people’s sin apparent and reflect the need for accepting the promises of God by faith. The promise of God was made possible through Christ. With transgressions being revealed by the Law and other Scripture, the need for accepting Christ’s work by faith is evident.

The very thing that people relied on for salvation—works of the Law—is the very thing that reveals how inadequate sinful people are. Only faith in Christ can bring redemption

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and forgiveness of sins. How foolish to ever think we could earn our own freedom from the guilt of sin!

1. What could not be accomplished by the Law (v. 21)?
2. What is promised “to them that believe” (v. 22)?

“Don’t ever think that there are many ways to the Divine. Jesus is the one qualified mediator, the only qualified sacrifice, and the only qualified Savior.” —Erwin Lutzer

CONCLUSION

Many people today think they can work their way to heaven. Their heart is set on earning favour with God by obeying certain traditions and rules. Little do they realize that God’s standard is perfection—a standard they cannot reach.

Other people ignore the standards of God’s Word, feeling that they deserve heaven because they once prayed “the sinner’s prayer.” They live any way they wish and then expect God to usher them into a heavenly home.

The only way we can gain freedom from the power and lure of sin, favour with a perfect God, and entrance into heaven is faith in Christ. He is the perfect One.

“Faith receives the promise, embraces it, and comforts the soul unspeakably with it.” —John Bunyan

GOLDEN TEXT CHALLENGE

“THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, IT IS EVIDENT: FOR, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH” (Gal. 3:11).

God is looking for people who will trust Him completely. He is the Creator and we, the created, must depend entirely on Him for salvation. Our trust and belief in His ability to see us as we are and our willingness to yield to His authority will set us free from the law of personal piety.

We have seen people who have lived as unbelievers, yet when they died the preacher told of their good deeds to others and their integrity. All their good deeds and honest dealings cannot substitute for faith in Christ. God’s people will show their faith by honouring God and worshiping together while living the life of faith.

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Living by faith embodies a daily, personal time of Bible reading and prayer. Faith comes from reading the Bible and learning of God's power over all the universe. Faith gives us the confidence to enter the throne room of God through prayer and intercede for others and ourselves. There is no greater lifestyle than the life of faith. Knowing that God is our heavenly Father and that He loves us creates the best future possible.

Daily Devotions:

M. Justified by Believing God's Promises • Genesis 15:1-6

T. God Keeps His Promises • 1 Kings 8:56-60

W. Prayer for God's Help • Psalm 119:145-152

T. Reconciled to God Through Faith • Romans 5:1-11

F. Examples of Faith • Hebrews 11:1-13

S. Live in God's Precious Promises • 2 Peter 1:1-8