

Galatians 3:1- 4:11 is a theological defense of the gospel against the Judaizers. The main issues being discussed are justification and that the reception of the Spirit is the determining factor showing that the Galatians were justified by faith.

In 3:1-5 Paul is trying to help the Galatians see why their temptation to return to the Law is so foolish. The two reasons given are that they are contradicting the work of Christ on the cross, and they are contradicting the work of the Spirit in their lives. Paul asks a number of rhetorical questions that drive home the point that salvation is not by works of the Law.

3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

3:2 This 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?

3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

3:4 Did you suffer so many things in vain-- if indeed it was in vain?

3:5 So 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?

The Galatians, like Peter (2:11-14), were on the verge of denying the gospel by their actions. Their fascination with circumcision had stripped the cross of its significance. In 3:1 the apostle calls them foolish and is astounded by their lack of understanding of the crucifixion and regression in their faith; it was as if a magician had cast a spell on them.

Their foolishness was inexcusable for before their eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. The verb "was publicly portrayed" literally means "was written in advance;" however, it was also used of public notices and *proclamations*. So Paul does not mean that the Galatians had witnessed Christ's crucifixion, but that the gospel was preached with such power and clarity that they knew beyond doubt that Jesus was the all-sufficient, sin-bearing, wrath-exhausting Son of God. How can they now deny what was so evident to them?

The significance of justification and the reception of the Spirit can be framed in just one question: "did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith (v.2)?" This also made their defection inexcusable.

The reception of the Holy Spirit is the sign that one belongs to the family of God. Paul assumes that all Christians receive the Spirit. It's not something that happens later.

- 1 Corinthians 2:12: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."
- Romans 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

- Romans 8:9: "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."
- 2 Corinthians 1:22: [God has] "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." (In a similar way in Ephesians 1:13-14 we are told that we "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.")
- Even Peter defended his position that the Gentiles had received the promise of salvation in the same way that the Jews had by appealing to their reception of the gift of the Spirit (Acts 15:8 cf. 10:44-48).

Verse 2 raises the question of how we receive the Spirit, and then answers it. Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?" Do we receive the Spirit as a reward for obedience, or is it faith in the gospel? The answer is in the question; it is "by hearing with faith." This is the heart of the issue. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." They couldn't have received the Spirit by keeping the Law for they had believed while they were uncircumcised. Believing, not doing, was the way that the Spirit was appropriated.

In verse 2 the emphasis was on the contrast between works of Law and hearing with faith; in verse 3 the contrast is between beginning by the Spirit and trying to be completed by the flesh. Verse 3 is directed to those who began to follow Christ but were in danger of trying to live the Christian life in a way that nullifies grace. Notice that Paul's question is framed in a different light than a simple refutation of the Judaizers' doctrine. The Judaizers were not teaching that after one was saved they needed to be circumcised to grow in their faith; they were saying that one needed to be circumcised to be saved. Paul is approaching the subject from a different angle; he is concluding that those in the Galatian churches had been saved because they had received the Spirit of God; now he is asking if they needed to add circumcision to progress in their walk with God.

This raises the question of how the Christian life works. We know it begins with faith; is it then perfected by the flesh (the autonomous self; who we were in Adam)? The answer, of course, is no. The point of the verse is that we must go on in the Christian life in the same way we started it. We began by the work of the Spirit; we must continue to rely on the Spirit. In Romans 1:17 Paul says that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith; as it is written, 'but the righteous man shall live by faith.'" In other words, the Christian life is a life of faith from beginning to end; faith is what initiates us into the way, faith is that which leads us along the way, and faith is the ultimate reality that will bring us into the presence of the everlasting God in the end. The essence of the Galatian heresy is the teaching that we begin the Christian life by faith, and then we grow in the Christian life by works, that is, by drawing on powers in ourselves to make our contribution to salvation.

"... the Christian life follows the same course whether the issue is justification or sanctification. It is not as if justification is through the Spirit and by faith, and sanctification is by works and human effort. Both justification and sanctification are due to the Spirit's work and are the result of faith" (Schreiner, 184-185).

3:4 is yet another rhetorical question: “Did you suffer so many things in vain-- if indeed it was in vain?” Suffering was a common experience in the days of the infant church. Paul now asks the Galatians if their suffering as Christians had been in vain. If they had placed themselves back under the Law, they were denying the gospel of grace that they had suffered for. Thus, their suffering would have been for no purpose.

Verse 5 closes this section with one last rhetorical question: “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?”

The Holy Spirit had manifested Himself to them through miracles before they had been told by the Judaizers that they needed to obey the Law. If salvation was dependent upon the Law, how does one explain these displays of power apart from the Law? Doesn't their whole life testify that the operative principle by which God has blessed them is the principle of believing, not of working?

Paul doesn't specify what miracles they were experiencing, but he assumes that they would know that they were evidence that the Spirit was present among them.

Before examining each verse in the next paragraph, it is helpful to note the structure of the section (as outlined by Silva in Commentary on the NT use of the OT, 792).

Thesis 1 (implied)

[God gives you the Spirit by the hearing of faith]

Grounds (v. 6)

Abraham believed God, and [his faith] was reckoned to him as righteousness

Thesis 2 (vv. 7, 9)

The ones who are of faith – these are the sons of Abraham. . .

The ones who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham

Grounds (v. 8)

All the Gentiles will be blessed in you

Thesis 3 (v. 10a)

as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse

Grounds (v. 10b)

cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them.

Thesis 4 (v. 11a)

no one is justified by the Law before God

Grounds (v. 11b)

the righteous man shall live by faith.

Stated premise (v. 12a)

The law is not of faith

Grounds for premise (v. 12b)

The one who does them will live by them

Conclusion (v. 14)

in 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.

3:6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

3:7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

3:8 The 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."

3:9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

The main point of verses 6-14 is that it is faith that qualifies a person to inherit Abraham's blessing. This is stated in two different ways, once in verse 7 and once in verse 9. Each of these verses is preceded by its Old Testament support (see above outline).

Verse 6 quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" Then verse 7 tells us what Paul wants us to see: "it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." Of course, faith is not a work that merits God's favor; it is faith *that apprehends* righteousness. Romans 3:21-22 tells us that apart from the Law *the righteousness of God* has been manifested . . . *even the righteousness of God through faith* in Jesus Christ for all those who believe. Believers are accepted in Christ and stand before God in His righteousness.

Then in a similar pattern, verse 8 quotes Genesis 12:3 (and 18:18), "In you shall all the nations be blessed," and verse 9 draws a conclusion from it: "so then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham."

Paul grounds his argument in redemptive history. In the Abrahamic Covenant, Abraham was promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The Judaizers had claimed that to be a child of Abraham, one needed to follow the Law and believe that Jesus was the Messiah; Paul's point is that if Abraham became a child of God by faith, it follows that others also become God's children in the same way. Those who have faith like Abraham are his true children and by referring to the Abrahamic Covenant, Paul shows that it had always been God's intention to include the Gentiles in the blessings of Abraham. "To put it differently: the apostle's point is not simply that we should believe as Abraham believed . . . but that those who believe become the recipients of the redemptive blessings associated with the patriarch" (Silva, 793).

A NOTE ON THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT:

The Abrahamic Covenant first appears in Genesis 12:1-3. The Covenant itself had no conditions that Abraham had to fulfill; it was rooted in God's sovereign purposes, a promissory oath on God's part.

We need to remember that God revealed truth to man progressively throughout history. Abraham didn't believe in Christ to be saved, he believed in God's promise, a promise that the nations would be blessed through him; this ultimately came to pass with the coming of Christ. Furthermore, it doesn't say in the Abrahamic Covenant that the Gentiles would be blessed through faith, however, as history unfolded and God revealed more to man, the way in which the Gentiles would be blessed became clear.

Although Abraham did not share in the blessings of the New Covenant with us, he was related to the Galatians in that he had become one of God's people by faith. In other words, Abraham, the patriarch of the nation of Israel, had more in common with the Gentile Galatians than with the Judaizers who were his physical descendants. Abraham was justified ("reckoned as righteous") by faith, not by works of the Law.

This argument is a shift from the "experiential" argument in 3:1-5 and has the effect of pushing those verses into the background. "This move was needed because the Galatian's error was, at a fundamental level, historical-theological in character. Misguided regarding the place of the Sinaitic covenant [the Law of Moses] in the plan of salvation, they were hoping for incorporation into the people of God (Abraham's descendants) through the wrong means (works of the Law)" (Silva, 793).

3:10 For 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."

3:10-14 is closely related to verses 6-9. In 3:6-9 Paul had made the point that the pathway to the Abrahamic blessing is to have faith like Abraham. Now verse 13 introduces the condition of those who do not have the faith of Abraham; those who rely on the Law as a means of justification are under a curse. Interestingly, Paul uses a verse that says that one is cursed if they *do not* abide in the law to prove that those who *do* abide in the law are cursed.

The Judaizers were claiming that those who do not keep the Law are under the condemnation of God. Paul says that the opposite is really the case; Deuteronomy 27:26 says, "cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them" (cf. Deut.28:58). It becomes obvious that Paul is assuming something that he does not state specifically, namely, Paul's argument is based on the unspoken assumption that man does not keep the Law and that his failure to comply with Law puts him under the Law's curse.

The emphasis here is on "all things." Perfect obedience was required if one was to avoid the penalty of the Law. Although within the OT system God had instituted sacrifices to atone for sin, they had become obsolete with the coming of Christ. Thus, those who want to depend upon the Law to be justified find that they have no means of atoning for sin; they therefore fell under the Law's curse.

Legalism is flawed because it is rooted in the inability to keep the Law perfectly. "Legalism is silly and shallow because it is attempted by people who have not and cannot keep God's commands, yet somehow they still think they can put God in their debt. . . Paul does not direct his attention to their wrong attitude of legalism. He shines the spotlight on what can be measured objectively – their transgressions, the fact human beings fall short of perfection" (Schreiner, 206).

3:11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Verse 10 concluded that no one actually keeps the Law and thus all are under its curse. Now in verse 11 Paul is drawing a corollary argument to that conclusion; No one, even under the OT system, has ever been justified by means of the Law. Not only are men incapable of keeping the Law (3:10), righteousness was never based on the Law; it has always been based on faith. Habakkuk 2:4 (coupled with Lev. 18:5) specifically states that "the righteous man shall live by faith."

It is interesting to look at Habakkuk 2:4 in its historical context. There God threatens to use Babylon to judge Israel for her disobedience to the Law. The question then arises as to God's justice. How can God who does not overlook evil allow the righteous to be swallowed up by the wicked? The answer is "the righteous man shall live by faith." Although Habakkuk does not mention Abraham, he is nonetheless telling the believing to follow in the footsteps of Abraham.

"Faith involves waiting for fulfillment and thus is always in danger of being shaken; therefore, steadiness and consistency are of its essence" (Silva, 802). Thus, Habakkuk 3:17-19 expresses the attitude of the believing in the midst of God's judgment of the ungodly: "Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places."

Thus, Habakkuk functions as a pattern for the people of God. "Like Abraham, the people of God are summoned to trust in Yahweh when circumstances conspire against trust. The fundamental call of Habakkuk is to trust in the Lord. . . It follows that Paul is a brilliant interpreter of Habakkuk and does not distort its message but capsulizes it. A right relationship with God is obtained by faith, not by keeping the Law" (Schreiner, 209). This same pattern follows in the Book of Romans. In Romans 1:17 he quotes Habakkuk 2:4 as a key to understanding the gospel. Then in Romans 4 he states that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. This is followed by Abraham's perseverance in the faith in Romans 4:18-21. Then in Romans chapters 6-8, Paul devotes a major section to the believer's sanctification. Faith and faithfulness go hand in hand. Sanctification involves faith as much as justification does.

3:12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

The argument of verses 11 and 12 takes place in three stages: (1) the Law cannot justify (v. 11a) because (2) it is faith that justifies (v. 11b), and (3) the Law is not a matter of faith (v.12) (Moo, 205).

Verse 12 provides a third reason why righteousness cannot be obtained by the Law, namely, because "the Law is not of faith." The Law measures man by his obedience; faith looks at what God has done for

him. Leviticus 18:5 says, “you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them.” He sees no need to flesh this out for he has already expressed this in the context. Paul’s reference to Leviticus at the end of verse 12 is to again emphasize that the Law makes threats on the basis of “doing.” Dependence on doing the Law doesn’t bring life, but a curse “because (1) principally, life comes from faith (v.11) and (2) practically, the Law cannot be done (v.10)” (Moo, 209). Some see this interpretation as reading too much into the text, but it is more difficult to think that Paul would spend eleven verses proving that men are saved by hearing with faith and not the works of the Law, and then out of the blue insert a verse that proves the non-faith character of the Law (Silva, 804).

3:13 Christ 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 "--

3:14 in 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.

The answer to the problem posed in verses 10-12 is now given. “The only way for the curse of the Law to be removed is by the redeeming work of Christ” (Schreiner, 215).

When Paul says “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,” he is referring to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 which says, “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God). . . .” Hanging was not a method of execution in the OT, rather, executed criminals were often hung in trees as a gruesome reminder and warning against those who broke the Law (Josh. 10:26-27 and 2 Sam. 21:6-9). There are a number of reasons why hanging the body up would be considered a curse of God. First, the person was cursed by God because he was a lawbreaker. His execution and the subsequent hanging of the body showed that he had broken the Law and was therefore under the curse of the Law. In addition, Roman execution, though different from Jewish execution, shared with the latter the shameful public exposure by hanging the person in such a way that they were exposed to all, and it was such exposure that reflected the divine curse (Silva, 798).

The cross of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews (I Cor. 1:23) for two reasons. First, they could not believe that God would allow the Christ to be delivered into the hands of sinners and be executed. But they also believed that the cross was evidence that Jesus was cursed by God. What they missed was that Christ was not executed for His own sins; He bore our sins and became “a curse *for us.*” He was our substitute; He was executed as a criminal for the crimes *we* had committed.

The main idea of Galatians 3:1-14 is this: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us . . . in 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.

Verse 14 can be interpreted in several different ways:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law (for two reasons)

(1) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, (2) so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In this case, the two clauses are coordinate, that is, each expresses a purpose/result of Christ's redemptive work.

Another interpretation is that the second clause depends on the first. In other words, God extended the Abrahamic blessing to Gentiles *so that* they can receive the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit flows from the Abrahamic blessing.

A third view sees the reception of the Spirit as the Abrahamic blessing – the Abrahamic blessing IS the reception of the Spirit (the two are in apposition).

In each view the result is the same: Gentiles receive the blessing of Abraham and the Spirit.

It should be noted that many Americans place way too much on way too little when it comes to defining saving faith. Faith is not by works, but it is not without evidence either. Belief is not a mere profession that Jesus is the Christ, but is evidenced by the presence of the Spirit. Paul didn't comfort the Galatians by reminding them that they had "prayed to receive Christ." He reminded them that the Spirit had indwelt them – something he assumed they would know without question.