

Lesson 6

July 12, 2026

Justification by Faith: Justification is being made right with God.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

In Galatians 3:1-25, the Apostle Paul emphasized that salvation comes through faith in Christ and not by works of the Law. He reminded the Galatian Christians that they received the Spirit through faith, not by observing the Law. To illustrate that God's promise is fulfilled through faith and not by works, Paul used the example of Abraham, whose faith was credited to him as righteousness. Paul explained that the Law served as a schoolmaster until Christ came, enabling believers to be justified by faith and become children of God. Once Christ fulfilled the Law, becoming the "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10) sacrifice for sin, the schoolmaster (Law) was no longer required.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Both Paul and James referred to Abraham to discuss the relationship between faith and works, but they emphasized different aspects. Paul highlighted Abraham's faith (Galatians 3 and Romans 4) as the basis of a Christian's justification, asserting that righteousness is credited through faith apart from works of the Law. However, James (2:21-24) focused on Abraham's works as evidence of faith in a Christian's life. The two writers' perspectives are complementary rather than contradictory, with Paul addressing the root of salvation (faith) and James addressing its fruit (works). Together, they present a balanced view.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH: Galatians 3:1-9.

- A. The Foolishness of a False Gospel, (1-5)
- B. The Faith of Abraham, (6-9)

2. REDEEMED FROM THE LAW'S CURSE: Galatians 3:10-18.

- A. Living by Faith, Not by Law, (10-14)
- B. The Promise Precedes the Law, (15-18)

3. THE LAW POINTS TO CHRIST: Galatians 3:19-25.

- A. The Purpose of the Law, (19-21)
- B. The Promise of Faith, (22-25)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH: Galatians 3:1-9.

A. The Foolishness of a False Gospel, Galatians 3:1-5.

Paul confronted the Galatians with a strong rebuke, questioning their spiritual discernment and reminding them of the Gospel they first received. He began by calling them “foolish” (v. 1) and asking how they could so easily be misled despite receiving the clear message of Christ crucified for their sins. Paul emphasized that their initial experience of the Spirit did not come through works of the Law but through faith in the Gospel. Paul’s question challenged the Galatians to reflect on how their spiritual journey began and to consider whether they were now abandoning the message of grace in favor of reliance on certain religious works. By reminding them of their personal experience in the Spirit, Paul reinforced that their salvation and spiritual growth were rooted and grounded in faith rather than in obedience to the Law.

Furthermore, Paul appealed to their past experiences of God’s power and provision, asking if these were achieved through human effort or by faith. This line of reasoning revealed the futility of attempting to perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit. Paul’s argument was both theological and practical, pointing out the inconsistency of turning to legalism after witnessing God’s transformative work in their lives. His words underscore that the Christian life is sustained by faith as the means of receiving God’s promises and experiencing His power. Paul sought to realign the Galatians with the truth of the Gospel, urging them to resist any teaching that undermined the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross.

B. The Faith of Abraham, Galatians 3:6-9.

Paul emphasized the centrality of faith in establishing a relationship with God by using Abraham as a wonder example. “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (v. 6), showing that righteousness does not come through works or adherence to the Law but through belief in Christ. By invoking Abraham, Paul connected the Galatian Christians to the broader narrative of God’s covenantal promises, illustrating that faith has always been the basis of justification, even before the Mosaic Law was given. This teaching served to dismantle the arguments of those who insisted that Gentile Christians must follow Jewish legal customs to be fully included in God’s family.

The cultural implications of the Law of Moses in Jewish life ran deep. For thousands of years, they had based their salvation and relationship with God on the Law. Paul said the Law was good in that it got them there, but now it was time to receive salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, which the Law had been pointing to. There was nothing wrong with maintaining certain customs, but these customs should not be imposed on other cultures as a means of earning or proving their salvation.

Paul extended this argument by proclaiming that those with faith “are the children of Abraham” (v. 7), making faith – not ethnicity or legal observance – the defining mark of God’s people. Paul noted the Gospel was foretold in God’s promise to Abraham “In thee shall all

nations be blessed” (v. 8). The universal scope of this blessing reveals God’s redemptive plan to include all people everywhere through faith in Christ. By basing his argument on Scripture, Paul assured the Gentile Galatians that their inclusion in God’s family was secure through faith alone. Therefore, he encouraged them to resist any teaching that sought to impose legalistic requirements on the Gospel.

Paul was amazed and alarmed that the Christians in Galatia could be so easily persuaded to embrace elements of the Law of Moses as a means of securing their salvation. The false teachers claimed to have further instructions from Jerusalem, intended to supplement what Paul taught. However, Paul argued that if the Galatians had examined the situation rationally, they would have recognized this was false teaching. If they had already been redeemed, as witnessed by the Holy Spirit in them, then why would they think anything should be added? We do not need a degree in theology to identify the errors in most false doctrines. The Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the commonsense God gave us should lead us to the truth.

2. REDEEMED FROM THE LAW’S CURSE: Galatians 3:10-18.

A. Living by Faith, Not by Law, Galatians 3:10-14.

Anyone who depends on the Law for righteousness is under a curse because the Law demands perfect obedience which no one achieves (v. 10). Quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul said that failure to uphold every aspect of the Law results in condemnation. This passage highlights the futility of human effort in attaining salvation and underlines the necessity for divine intervention. Paul contrasts this with the principle of faith, citing Habakkuk 2:4 to affirm that “the just shall live by faith” (v. 11), thereby establishing faith as the cornerstone of a right relationship with God.

The Law did not originate in faith (v. 12). However, rightly understood, the Law will make people aware of their spiritual bankruptcy and spur them to flee from their works of righteousness and, by faith, to embrace the righteousness of Christ for salvation.

In verses 13-14, Paul proclaimed the redemptive work of Christ as the solution to humanity’s plight under the curse of the Law. Christ became a curse for us by taking upon Himself the penalty of sin through His crucifixion, fulfilling the promise of redemption. This act freed believers from the curse and opened the way for Gentiles to receive the blessings promised to Abraham. Through faith in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles gain access to the Spirit and the inheritance of God’s promises. These verses encapsulate the heart of the Gospel message, emphasizing that salvation is a gift of grace received through faith rather than a reward for human effort. Through Jesus, we are “redeemed ... from the curse of the Law” (v. 13).

B. The Promise Precedes the Law, Galatians 3:15-18.

The analogy of a human covenant is used to emphasize the unchanging nature of God’s promises. Once a covenant is ratified, it cannot be annulled or altered, emphasizing the permanence of God’s promise to Abraham. Paul said the promise was given not to Abraham’s “seeds” (plural) but to his singular “Seed” (v. 16), which he identified as Christ. This distinction is crucial because it demonstrates that the promise was always intended to be fulfilled ultimately

in Christ, not through adherence to the Mosaic Law. By doing so, Paul revealed the permanency of God's redemptive plan, showing that the Law, which came 430 years later, did not invalidate the earlier promise.

Furthermore, Paul contrasted the Law and the promise to clarify their distinct roles in God's plan of salvation. He argued that the inheritance of God's blessing came not through the Law but through the promise given to Abraham by grace. The Law served a different purpose and did not replace or nullify the promise. This argument reinforced Paul's broader message in Galatians: Justification and salvation come through faith in Christ alone, not through works. By rooting his argument in Scripture and covenant theology, Paul provided a compelling defense of the Gospel. He reassured believers that their inheritance was secure in Christ, based on God's unchanging promise.

While some might equate a covenant with a contract, we should not be confused. A covenant isn't some fine-print agreement filled with loopholes where someone can find a way out. A covenant with God is as straightforward as it gets: promises made by the Almighty with no wiggle room for creative reinterpretation. Take God's covenant with Abraham, for instance. It wasn't just a family heirloom to be passed down – it was focused on a single descendant. This descendant was none other than Jesus Christ. Why? Because only through Him can the blessing of salvation be available to all. And through faith in Jesus Christ, everyone who believes gets grafted into this divine lineage, becoming a spiritual descendant of Abraham. Christians are part of the family tree, and no DNA test is required!

3. THE LAW POINTS TO CHRIST: Galatians 3:19-25.

A. The Purpose of the Law, Galatians 3:19-21.

Paul addressed the purpose of the Law and its relationship to God's promises. He explained that the Law was added "because of transgressions" (v. 19) until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus. This highlights the Law's temporary and preparatory nature, revealing human sinfulness and the need for a Savior. The Law was not given to replace or cancel God's covenant with Abraham, which was based on faith and grace. Instead, it acted as a guardian, pointing humanity toward the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan through Christ. Salvation is not achieved through adherence to the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Paul clarified that the Law is not opposed to God's promises but rather operates within His divine purpose. The Law could not impart life or righteousness; if it could, then righteousness would come by keeping it. Instead, the Law's role was to expose humanity's inability to achieve righteousness on its own, thereby driving people toward faith in Christ. Paul's commentary invites reflection on the sufficiency of Christ's work and the grace of God in providing salvation apart from human effort. It also challenged the Galatians to understand the Law's proper place – not as a means of justification, but as a tool to lead them to a deeper reliance on God's promise fulfilled in Christ. Through this message, Paul reinforces the centrality of faith and grace in God's plan for redemption.

B. The Promise of Faith, Galatians 3:22-25.

This passage highlights the pivotal role of faith in our relationship with God, and the transition from the Law to grace. Scripture declares that all are under sin, underscoring every person's need for salvation. The Law served as a school-master, revealing sin and pointing to the necessity of a Savior. However, it was never intended to be the ultimate means of righteousness. Instead, righteousness comes through faith in Christ, who fulfilled the Law and provided the pathway to justification. This reveals the transformative power of faith, which liberates us from the bondage of legalism and ushers us into a covenant of grace.

Furthermore, the text illustrates the purpose of the Law as a temporary measure until Christ's arrival. It functioned as a tutor, guiding humanity toward the promise of faith. Once faith in Christ was revealed, believers were no longer under the Law's supervision, signifying a shift from external regulations to an internal, Spirit-led relationship with God. This transition marked a profound change in how individuals related to God – not through adherence to rules but through trust in His redemptive work. The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice gives us the freedom to live by faith, rooted in grace rather than works.

While we are no longer bound by the Law of Moses, we are not without rules to live by. Paul said we are under "the law of Christ," which he explains is fulfilled through loving and supporting one another (Galatians 6:2). Rather than being a rigid list of dos and don'ts, this law can be summarized as loving God and loving others (Mark 12:30-31). These two simple yet profound commandments form the foundation of everything taught in the Scriptures. Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). The same grace that saves us also equips and empowers us to live out this love in our daily lives. It's not about checking the boxes but about allowing God's love to flow through us as we grow in faith and grace, making a difference in the lives of those around us.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is a beautiful journey of following Jesus and living according to His teachings. He has gone before us to show us the way so we can ask, "What would Jesus do?"

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Too often, holiness is associated with legalism, which is not the case. Holiness is the ongoing work of grace in our lives as we daily conform more clearly to the image and likeness of God in us.

The Issue Troubling the Churches of Galatia.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church says, “St. Paul wrote [the] letter to his Galatian converts on receiving news of a counter-mission requiring them to keep all the commands of the Jewish Law, and thereby (as he thought) imperiling the whole value of their faith in Christ.”

The issue troubling the churches of Galatia had been addressed by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem in early AD 50. They (the Jerusalem Council) ruled that Gentile believers in Christ would be accepted by the church without requiring of them the ritualistic and ceremonial practices of the Jews (Acts 15:1-29).

Paul and Barnabas established the churches in Galatia during Paul’s First Missionary Journey (AD 48-49). During Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (AD 50-52), he and Silas ministered in the churches of Galatia established during Paul’s First Missionary Journey.

On Paul’s Second Missionary Journey, he and Silas were carrying with them written copies of the Jerusalem Council’s decision. “And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them [the previously established churches] the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). But this did not stop the Jew-Gentile issue from troubling the churches.

After the decision of the Jerusalem Council, Jewish believers in Jesus Christ continued living as devout, practicing Jews and as Christians, but they did not require Gentile believers in Christ to live as Jews (read Acts 21:17-25; 22:3).

Christianity and Judaism are vitally related to one another. Jesus, His twelve apostles, and all the first believers in Jesus as the Messiah were Jews. Without the Old Testament, there would be no New Testament. Without Judaism, there would be no Christianity. Jesus, by His teachings, and His disciples by their writing, brought into the New Testament all the moral and ethical commandments of God in the Old Testament. As a result of this, Judeo-Christian beliefs and values are the spiritual heritage of every believer in Jesus Christ.

WORKSHEET

Wrong Ways

How do different religions teach that someone can become righteous? Here are four examples:

Jehovah's Witnesses try to work their way to eternal life by door-to-door proselytizing, being loyal to their leaders, and keeping the laws of Jehovah.

Muslims believe their good deeds must outweigh their bad ones. This includes fasting and going on pilgrimages.

Buddhists seek to be rejoined in spirit with the gods by mastering their eightfold path.

Hindus believe that by ridding themselves of bad karma, they can free themselves from the cycle of reincarnation and become one with the gods.

What is the Biblical response to each of these positions?

To Jehovah's Witnesses, Isaiah 64:6:

To Muslims, Titus 3:4-6:

To Buddhists, Matthew 12:32:

To Hindus, Hebrews 9:27: