

Studies in Galatians

Chapter Three

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

These people believed that an evil spirit can come upon someone by a person giving them an “evil eye”, which is what the word translated “bewitched” means. Because of this meaning Paul’s use of the word “eyes” in the rest of the sentence is particularly meaningful. These people were very foolish to be misled by the false teachers who wanted to add works to faith for someone to become righteous before God. Paul is saying that for them to be so foolish someone must have cast an evil eye upon them. He is probably being facetious in his use of bewitched but he is very serious in his use of the word “foolish”. He is very upset that they should be so easily and quickly led astray from the truth that he taught them. These people had been taught the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as the means of people being declared righteous before Holy God by him. This teaching had been done in public and as clearly as Paul could teach. But as soon as someone comes along and says that you are able to add to this teaching by your good works the people were quick to accept such a foolish teaching. We are very conceited in thinking that we can do anything to please God by our own actions. But people have always been so conceited and still are quick to fall prey to such teachings.

Gal 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?”

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

The receiving of the Holy Spirit should be such an event in our life that we can judge the time of our regeneration from that occurrence. Certainly if we are not possessed by the Holy Spirit we are not Christians:

Romans 8:9 “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

The teaching by the Pentecostals has so perverted the Christian’s experience with the Holy Spirit that many Christians shy away from thinking about Him. However the Holy Spirit is God and He is an integral part of our being children of God. My experience with Him was so vivid in my life that I remember the event very well. I went from a person with no ability to please God or to understand His Word into a person who depended upon Jesus Christ for His ability to please God for me and into a person who could now read and understand God’s Word. This experience was punctuated by my visualizing a

light that had come down to be in me as a result of reading in John chapters 16 and 17 about the Holy Spirit and what He would do for us. Most people with whom I talk did not have such an experience but they must have had a moment when they went from being an enemy of God into being a child of God. The moment must have been real in some sense and perhaps they are just reluctant to talk about it because someone might think that they are weird.

Paul uses the knowledge of the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit as a point of reference for salvation. So he asks them: How did you receive the Spirit? He knows that they received the Spirit from his teaching of the Gospel message and its ramifications in their lives. He knows that they did not receive the Spirit as a result of their works. So he gets them to thinking about their experience. They have to know that they had received the Spirit prior to the false apostles teaching them about how they have to have works to be saved. When he can get them to think about the order of salvation: regeneration, belief, indwelling Holy Spirit, and then works as a result of their salvation, then he will have them thinking correctly and able to reject the false teaching. They will then realize that they were perfected by faith and works were a result of their internal righteousness that was imputed to them.

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

Gal 3:5 Does He then, 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 law says: “Do this” but the Gospel says “Christ has done it all”.

The law says: “Works of human achievement are required” but the Gospel says “Only faith in the achievements of Christ are required”.

The law makes demands and requires us to obey but the Gospel brings promises and requires only that we believe.

The suffering that they did before the false teachers told them that they had to do works of the law for salvation would have been in vain if works were required in addition to faith. But their suffering was not really in vain since works are not required. Certainly Jesus did not provide them with the Spirit based upon their works. He did His miracles to prove that He was God and His works are all the works that are required. All we have to do is believe He is God after He has given us the faith empowering us to be able to believe.

Gal 3:6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

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

Gal 3:8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you."

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

Paul was really brilliant in his use of Abraham because his receiving of righteousness was before Moses was given the law. Since the law had not yet been given how could

Abraham achieve righteousness by works of the law? There was no requirement of circumcision yet and none of the requirements of the law so the law played no part in Abraham achieving his righteousness. He believed God's promises and that is all that he did. Faith is the empowering of people to act according to God's will and one of those acts is to believe. So Abraham had also been given faith so that he could believe that a 90 year old man who had no children would have descendants of the number according to how many stars he could count.

Nineveh long before Moses was also justified when they had faith in the teachings of Jonah, no matter how reluctant he was. They did not do works but only believed and repented. Thus God counted a heathen king as righteous when he believed and showed by his actions that he had believed.

Jonah 3:6 "When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."

Verses seven and nine affirm that the descendents of Abraham will be those of spiritual descent and not necessarily of physical descent. We also see here that God promised this blessing to be spread among all the nations of the world and not just among the Jews. The promise to Abraham then was not just for land. How would the nations of the world be blessed by the Jews receiving a land? The land then was a physical promise to the Jews and the seed was a spiritual promise to the nations of the world. The Galatians should not have been fooled by the foolish teachings of the false apostles because God had been teaching the same criteria for righteousness since the beginning. We also today should carefully test all teaching according to the Scriptures especially since now we have the entire Bible.

Gal 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."

Gal 3:11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith."

Gal 3:12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them."

Gal 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"--

Gal 3:14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

God has always made it plain that anyone who does not properly perform all of the works of the law is cursed:

Deut 27:26 "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"

God has also always made it plain that the only way to be declared righteous is by faith:
Hab 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."

God does leave open the option that someone may live if he can keep all of His statutes and judgments:

Lev 18:5 "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord."

But only God can keep such requirements.

Psa 14:1 "(For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.

Psa 14:2 The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God.

Psa 14:3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."

All who sin before the righteous God are cursed and since none of us can obey the requirements for righteousness God sent Jesus to suffer the curse that was due to us. He took my curse upon Him that day as portrayed by His death on the tree. The Jews would not let a dead person remain on the tree but they would remove it before night unless hindered by other authorities.

Deut 21:22 "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,

Deut 21:23 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), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

Remember that they took down the body of Jesus to put it in a tomb before night. The reason that Jesus cried out "My God, why have you forsaken me?" was because at that moment He became a curse for me and for all who were chosen to become children of God. It is very important for us to remember that Jesus was perfect and without any sin but He became a curse before God by taking the sins of His children upon Him. At that moment God the Father could not look upon such an accumulation of sin so He turned away from Jesus for the first time ever. The Jews had such a hard time believing this on their own because it was inconceivable that the Messiah could be cursed hanging on a tree. The truth sunk in when they realized that He was cursed because He took on our sins rather than for His sins.

There is a three-fold blessing for the Christian believer: justification before God, the promise of the Spirit, and eternal life before God. When we are born again we become one of the recipients of the promise that God made to Abraham so long ago.

Gal 3:15 “Brethren, 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.

Gal 3:16 Now 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.

Gal 3:17 What 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.

Gal 3:18 For 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.”

God first called Abraham out of a hostile land and gave him a promise of a seed through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed. The promise continued through his son Isaac and then through his son Jacob. Jacob and his twelve sons all died outside of the Promised Land. Of course no covenant may be changed or modified once it has been legalized. The promise is to a seed with “seed” being singular rather than plural. So God was referring to one person to come sometime in the future. Paul clarifies that the seed is referring to Jesus Christ. Centuries then passed before God raised Moses. The 430 years refers to the time between Abraham and Moses. This Law that came so long after God's covenant to Abraham does not invalidate the previous covenant so the promise continues to be in effect. God did not make the covenant with Abraham contingent upon any obedience to a law but it was a covenant based upon a promise from God. I have to say again that Paul's argument is brilliant in that he shows that Abraham was declared righteous based upon his faith only and not on the obedience to any law, especially since the law was not given until 430 years after the death of Abraham. As stated after verses eight and nine, the covenant to Abraham was for land for the Jews and for righteousness for all nations through the promised seed to him. The Christian religion is the religion of Abraham and not of Moses. It would then be foolish of any of us to think that any works was involved in being declared righteous before God.

Gal 3:19 “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.

Gal 3:20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

Gal 3:21 Is 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.

Gal 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

Paul has a great way of teaching by asking the question that he knows is burning in your mind and then answering the question as he does in verse 19 and 21. The law was never given as a means of attaining righteousness before God but it was introduced to show people their need for being given righteousness apart from any work of the people. The law's main function then was to expose sin as a violation of the holy law of God and to

show that we all are guilty of transgressing all of the holiness of God and in need of His help in being declared righteous in spite of our sin. The law then looked forward to the seed promised to Abraham, Jesus Christ, through whom sins could be forgiven. The intermediate is Moses and the Scripture often speaks of the angels being involved in the giving of the law.

Deut 33:2 "And he said, "The Lord came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them."

Psalm 68:17 "The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness."

Acts 7:53 "you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

Heb 2:2 "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense,"

Thus the law came first hand to Abraham from God (this is the reason Paul stated God is only one in verse 20) and third hand to the people: God, angels, Moses, the people.

Paul then answers another possible question concerning how righteousness would be attained. If righteousness could be attained via works then there would have been no reason for the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. But actually the law served as a cage for man and the only way out of the cage to righteousness was the same as it is today. Nobody can achieve righteousness on their own so all had to look forward in faith to the coming of Jesus. Today we look back on the first coming of Jesus and look forward to the second coming of Him in judgment. Note that the promise by faith in Jesus has to be given to the people who believe. So the concept of regeneration first and then believe and then faith in Jesus being given to the regenerate people is the same now and forever.

Gal 3:23 "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.

Gal 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Gal 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

The biography of every Christian person is that we were first kept under bondage to the law and then set free to faith in Jesus. The words "in custody" had to do with being kept in a prison cell so that we could not escape. The "tutor" in those times was not some kind person but a person with a stick to enforce discipline. I am reminded of a clarinet "tutor" that I had at a band camp one summer. This person had a pencil in his hand that he used

to rap a finger of mine that did not properly cover the key hole and thereby resulted in a tone that was not pure. I have to say that my fingers were rapped a number of times during those lessons! His tutelage resulted in my having a much better tone but it was not pleasant! Similarly the law kept us in prison and under a harsh disciplinarian. Praise God, He did not leave me there but brought me to faith in Jesus Christ so that I was indeed free. Jesus became a curse for me so that I might be set free and I can have peace with God. God is now no longer my Judge and Tutor but He is my Father!

Gal 3:28 “There 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.

Gal 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

There is no merit in being a Jew or a Greek or a slave or a free man or a male or a female. None of these characteristics earn us any special favor with God. Since we are now all in Christ we are all one.

John 17:22 “And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one;”

God is the universal King and the universal Creator but He is only the Father to Jesus and to those who are in Christ.

John 17:22 “And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one;”

For those of us who belong to Christ we are then fulfilling part of God’s promise to Abraham. We are heirs according to the promise made to Abraham over 5000 years ago. I will repeat an earlier comment here that Christianity is the religion of Abraham. The church then is God’s true Israel.

References

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