

## LESSON 8

October 22, 2023

### Unit II: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails

# All or Nothing at All

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 1:3-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:1-18

PRINT PASSAGE: Galatians 3:1-14

### KEY VERSE

**This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:2, KJV)**

.....

**I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (Galatians 3:2, NIV)**

### LESSON AIMS

**As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:**

- Understand that we are not justified by following the law.
- Acknowledge that spiritual growth relies more on faith than works.
- Convey to others the message that Christianity is about more than following rules.

### \*KEY TERMS

**Curse (verse 10)**—Greek: *katara* (kat-ar'-ah): a spell; accursed; properly, what has to “go down” (penalties received) due to condemnation.

**Foolish (verse 1)**—Greek: *móros* (mo-ros'): not having understanding; dull; stupid.

**Promise (verse 14)**—Greek: *epaggelia* (ep-ang-el-ee'-ah): a summons; a pledge.

**\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

### INTRODUCTION

Can you recall this scenario? “Prospective members” walk down the aisles, take seats the deacons have set out, and the church explodes with uninhibited praise. Once the congregation “recovers” or quietens enough to hear confessions of faith or acknowledgment of letters from sister churches or first Christian experience, the pastor welcomes candidates for baptism and extends the “right hand of fellowship” at some point to others. Usually, after announcing that these members have the same rights and privileges as all other members, the pastor lists all available ministries and encourages them to participate. Looking back,



### The Biblical Context

Paul's epistle to the Galatians derives its title from the region in Asia Minor (now Turkey) that was the location of the churches which he addressed. Paul's Damascus Road experience transformed him from Christianity's chief enemy to its greatest missionary. His post-conversion ministry grew Christianity from a Palestinian Jewish movement into one encompassing and including many Jews and Gentiles within the Roman Empire. Galatians is one of thirteen letters written to Gentile Christians or fellow laborers in ministry. Paul's purpose in writing this epistle was to counter false teachers determined to sabotage the doctrine of justification by faith. Ignoring the consensual decree of the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:23-29), false teachers spread the deceptive teaching that Gentiles must convert to Judaism and submit to the Mosaic Law before becoming Christians.

Appalled by the Galatians' reception of this dangerous heresy, Paul wrote this letter to defend justification by faith and warn the churches of the spiritually damaging consequences of abandoning this essential doctrine.

the emphasis on "getting involved" possibly led to the idea that one must be "doing something" within the body to maintain good standing with God and to prove they had experienced a spiritual change. I'm sure you've heard comments like, "They just aren't committed because they're not doing anything," or have been pressured to get involved in validating salvation. As sincere as these expressions may have been, in some ways, they bordered on relying on works and observing rules and regulations to please God and maintain membership in local congregations. Similarly, Jewish legalists during Paul's ministry promoted this concept. Unfortunately, these Judaizers' teaching undermined his ministry to Gentile Christians in Galatia by suggesting that salvation depended on works—adhering to the requirements of the Mosaic Law, specifically circumcision.

### ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

#### Use Your Head!

*(Galatians 3:1-5)*

#### KJV

**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?**

**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?**

**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?**

#### NIV

**YOU FOOLISH Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.**

**2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?**

**3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?**

**4 Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain?**

**5 So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?**

In Galatians 2, Paul declared that the only way to become right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ, not the Mosaic Law. In chapter 3, he presented three logical arguments proving this to be true. Paul began his first argument with a direct and harsh tone (**verse 1**). He accused the Galatians of being foolish, as if someone had bewitched or beguiled them for embracing a doctrine declaring Christ's death unnecessary. In this context, "foolish" means "spiritually dull" (a lack of obedience, not intelligence). Paul's preaching of "Christ and Him crucified" had been so effective that the Galatians could almost see or visualize Him on the cross like a publicly displayed announcement on a billboard. Yet, they had allowed the Judaizers to divert their eyes from Christ to the Law. Therefore, Paul asked them four rhetorical questions to redirect them to faith alone as the only path to salvation. First, Paul asked how they received the Holy Spirit (**verse 2**), challenging whether their salvation and gift of the Holy Spirit was by faith or works.

They received the Spirit by faith because the Galatians had no access to the Law. Second, Paul asked them how works could sanctify them to become progressively more like Christ (**verse 3**). Paul wanted the Galatians to realize the foolishness of believing that they would mature spiritually by works after beginning Christianity by faith.

Paul's third question challenged them to reflect on the persecution that new believers and the apostles experienced (**verse 4**). Paul had warned the church to expect to suffer as converts. Now, if they turned from grace to works, all their suffering was for nothing. Finally, the apostle asked on what basis God had performed miracles among them (**verse 5**; see Acts 14:3, 8-11). The expected response was by His divine power, not works of the Law. The phrase among you can also translate as "within you."

Thus, these miracles could include changes within their lives as Christians and wonders within their fellowship. Paul's initial argument challenged the Galatians to "use their heads" and logically reflect on how they received salvation. If they did, the logical conclusion was that not knowing the Law, they were Christians because they believed and accepted the Gospel message of justification by faith in Christ alone. Some had been "beguiled" (smoothly convinced) into believing that switching churches, trusting some new (erroneously interpreted) doctrines, or following a dynamic, charismatic leader would bring them closer to God. They forgot that becoming a Christian meant accepting God's plan of salvation by faith. The church must be as vigilant as Paul in addressing this error and assisting believers in standing firmly on God's Word.

### **🔍 WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Why is it critically important that the church teach the doctrines of justification and sanctification as biblically presented?**



## Look to Your Spiritual Father (*Galatians 3:6-9*)

### KJV

- 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.

### NIV

- 6 So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”  
7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.  
8 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.”  
9 So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul’s second argument against the Judaizers’ false teaching and the Galatians’ gullibility included pointing them back to Abraham, the spiritual father of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Judaizers claimed they had the Old Testament on their side, looking back to Moses. Paul took them back farther than Moses to Abraham. How was Abraham declared righteous in God’s sight (**verse 6**)? Paul’s answer was simple and direct. He proclaimed that Abraham believed God by faith, which God credited as righteousness (see Genesis 15:6). Abraham demonstrated faith in God’s faithfulness and ability to fulfill His promises. God accepted it as righteousness, justifying him before he was circumcised (**verse 7**). Now, the question was how these legalists could continue to insist that circumcision was essential for acceptance by God.

Connecting the past and the present in this context, Paul declared that all who claimed to be Abraham’s children were saved by faith, just as he was. Therefore, Abraham’s spiritual children, Jews and Gentiles, are all declared righteous by faith. Paul quoted Genesis 12:3 to prove that from the very beginning of Abraham’s faith journey, God had promised the blessing of salvation to all the world nations (**verse 8**).

Hence, God had announced the justification of uncircumcised Gentiles to Abraham centuries earlier as part of the covenant that God made with him. Paul concludes the second phase of his argument by emphasizing that only those who have faith will receive the blessing of justification, as did Abraham (**verse 9**). Paul asserted that believers must accept the message of Scripture as the voice of God. What the Bible says, God says. Therefore, the church must preach and teach the absolute authority of Scripture. To the Romans, Paul wrote that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, not by works or human-centered interpretation.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**How does Paul’s use of Scripture challenge individual Christians and the church’s emphasis on teaching, studying, and applying Scripture to life?**

## Look to Christ (*Galatians 3:10-14*)

### KJV

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.

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.

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.

### NIV

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”

12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.”

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”

14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Paul established the doctrine of justification by challenging the Galatians to reflect on their Christian experience and Abraham's. In his final argument, Paul used Christ's work on the Cross to conclude his case. First, he proved the futility of relying on the Law (**verses 10-11**). The Judaizers taught that the Law could justify sinners, but Paul proved that it could only condemn them (see **verse 12**). Quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul revealed that the Law demanded perfection and essentially cursed those who failed to achieve it. Breaking only one of the Law's commands made one guilty of breaking all of them.

Consequently, since all people sin at some point, everyone is under the curse, thus destroying the supposition that sinners can gain acceptance by God through human effort. Paul supported this principle by quoting Habakkuk 2:4b—“The just shall live by his faith,” verifying that judicial obedience was never the basis for justification, even during the Law's dispensational period. Neither is it possible, Paul explained, to find justification by combining faith and the Law. Again, Paul uses Scripture to prove this impossibility (see Leviticus 18:5), where only the perfect performance of the Law could win God's approval. Since that is unachievable for anyone, the Law only condemns, making faith the only path to God. **Verses 13-14** summarize Paul's complete defense of justification by faith.

Paul proclaims that there is hope for all lawbreakers under the curse. Our hope is in Christ's substitutionary death on the Cross. He became a curse for us. Christ's redemptive act delivered humanity by transferring the Law's curse from sinners to Himself, the sinless Savior. Again, Paul confirms his teaching with Scripture (see Deuteronomy 21:23). Under the Old Testament, those guilty of a capital offense were displayed on a stake or post to represent God's rejection. The manner of Christ's death on the Cross symbolically showed Him coming under God's curse. The benefit of Christ's redemptive work was twofold: (1) Gentiles could receive Abraham's blessing of justification, and (2) all who believe might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. Before condemning the Galatians for their spiritual naivete, realize that today, multiple religious allurements appeal to the senses and emotions and draw people away from the basic principles of God's Word toward legalism. The solution is proper doctrinal teaching supported by sound doctrinal living.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**How can the faith community promote faith as the means of spiritual growth instead of human effort (works)?**

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT**

Paul sets an example worthy of emulating in teaching how salvation is received—by faith in Christ alone and not through effort or religiously following rules and regulations. The apostle's masterful use of Christian experience and Scripture to convince the Galatians to abandon rule keeping to achieve right standing with God should challenge and motivate the faith community to aggressively teach what God's Word says about salvation and how to live by faith.

### **YOUR LIFE**

What is your understanding about the essential doctrines of justification by faith and sanctification? How do they affect your relationship with God? This week, commit to studying these doctrines individually or within a study group so that you will mature spiritually and consistently live by faith daily.

### **YOUR WORLD!**

Consider the following questions in this week's lesson context and commit to finding doable solutions as answers. First, what are some of the most "bewitching" religious ideologies that either draw people away from the faith community or divide it? Second, how can the church address them? Third, what changes can the church make to address or lessen their adverse effects?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, we praise and thank You for justifying us by faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ. In gratitude, we commit to living by faith to join You in Your mission of offering salvation to all humanity. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

# Home Daily Bible Readings

## Notes

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