

# Galatians: No Other Gospel

## *Part 5. Faith not Works*

As we continue to journey through Paul's letter to the Galatians, we come to chapter three, and today we will be looking at the first 14 verses. In this passage, Paul addresses the Galatians' foolishness in turning away from the gospel of faith to rely on the works of the law. He reminds them of the power of faith in Christ and the futility of trying to earn God's favour through human effort. This message is vital for us today as it challenges us to examine the basis of our own faith and reliance on God's grace.

**Galatians 3:1-14** *You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 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? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain - if it really was in vain? 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? So also, Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

*Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 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." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 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."*

*Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." 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." 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.*

### **I. The Foolishness of the Galatians (Verses 1-5)**

Paul begins this section with a strong rebuke to the Galatians, calling them foolish for turning away from the gospel of grace to rely on the works of the law.

#### *Paul's Rebuke*

Paul opens with a sharp rebuke: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" This strong language indicates his deep frustration and concern. The term "bewitched" suggests that the Galatians have been deceived or charmed away from the truth. Paul reminds them that Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified before their very eyes, emphasizing the centrality of Christ's sacrifice. Paul's use of the word "foolish" conveys the seriousness of their error. It reflects not just a lack of understanding but a willful departure from the truth they once embraced. This strong rebuke serves as a wake-up call to the Galatians, urging them to reconsider their actions and return to the true gospel.

#### *Receiving the Spirit*

Paul asks a critical question: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?" This rhetorical question underscores that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through faith, not by adhering to the law.

Their initial experience of the Spirit was a result of believing the gospel message. The reception of the Holy Spirit is powerful evidence of God's work in a believer's life. It is not something that can be earned or achieved through human effort. Paul's question highlights the contrast between the works of the law and the simplicity of faith. The Spirit's presence is a testimony to the sufficiency of Christ's work and the effectiveness of the gospel.

### *Foolishness of Returning to the Law*

Paul continues, *"Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?"* This question exposes the absurdity of starting with faith and then attempting to achieve spiritual maturity through human effort. Paul reminds them of their experiences and the miracles they witnessed, which were all the result of faith, not the law. The Galatians' attempt to return to the law reflects a misunderstanding of the gospel's power and purpose. Paul's rhetorical question emphasizes the futility of relying on human effort after experiencing the transformative work of the Spirit. This challenge calls the Galatians to recognize their error and return to the foundational truth of faith in Christ.

### *Experiencing in Vain*

Paul asks, *"Have you experienced so much in vain - if it really was in vain?"* This question emphasizes the significance of their spiritual experiences and the risk of nullifying them by turning back to the law. Paul appeals to their past encounters with God's grace and the Spirit's work in their lives as a basis for rejecting the law's demands.

The potential of experiencing in vain reminds us of the importance of perseverance in the faith. Paul's question serves as a warning that the journey of faith is a continual reliance on God's grace, not a temporary phase that can be replaced by legalism. It challenges the Galatians to hold fast to the gospel and avoid the pitfalls of self-reliance.

### *Miracles and Faith*

Paul reinforces his argument by asking, *"Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?"* The answer is obvious - God works through faith, not through the law. This statement underscores the ongoing nature of faith in the Christian life, as God's work continues to be manifested through belief, not human efforts.

The reference to miracles emphasizes the power and presence of God in the believers' lives. These miraculous works are a testament to the effectiveness of faith and the inadequacy of the law. Paul's question challenges the Galatians to recognize the source of God's work in their midst and to remain grounded in the gospel.

## **II. The Example of Abraham (Verses 6-9)**

Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate the principle of justification by faith, not by works.

### *Abraham's Faith*

Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6: *"So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'"* Abraham's righteousness was not based on his works but on his faith in God's promise. This example serves as a powerful argument for the principle of justification by faith.

Abraham's faith is a foundational example for understanding justification. His belief in God's promise was the basis for his righteousness, not his adherence to the law, which was given centuries later. This example reveals the timeless nature of faith as the means of receiving God's righteousness.

### *Children of Abraham*

Paul explains, *“Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.”* This statement highlights the spiritual lineage of all believers. Those who have faith in Christ are considered true descendants of Abraham, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background.

Being children of Abraham emphasizes the inclusivity of the gospel. It transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries, uniting all believers in the family of God. This truth challenges any form of exclusivity or elitism within the church, calling believers to recognize their shared identity in Christ.

### *Scripture’s Foresight*

Paul continues, *“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.’”* This reference to Genesis 12:3 shows that God’s plan to justify the Gentiles by faith was revealed early in biblical history.

The foresight of Scripture reveals the continuity of God’s redemptive plan. The promise to Abraham anticipated the inclusion of the Gentiles and the universal scope of the gospel. This understanding reinforces the consistency of God’s purposes and the reliability of His promises.

### *Blessing through Faith*

Paul concludes, *“So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* This statement affirms that the blessings promised to Abraham are extended to all who share his faith. Faith, not works, is the basis for receiving God’s blessings.

The blessing through faith highlights the generosity and grace of God. It emphasizes that the same blessings promised to Abraham are available to all who believe, regardless of their background. This truth encourages believers to trust in God’s faithfulness and to rely on His grace for their spiritual inheritance.

## **III. The Curse of the Law (Verses 10-14)**

Paul then contrasts the blessing of faith with the curse of relying on the works of the law.

### *The Curse of the Law*

Paul states, *“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.’”* This quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26 highlights the impossibility of perfectly keeping the law and the resulting curse for failing to do so.

The curse of the law emphasizes the law’s stringent demands and the impossibility of achieving righteousness through human effort. Only one human has ever walked this planet and perfectly obeyed the law of God – and that was Jesus of Nazareth. Paul exposes the futility of relying on the law for justification and underscores the need for a different means of salvation. This realization points to the inadequacy of legalism and the necessity of faith in Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

### *Justification by Faith*

Paul continues, *“Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’”* This quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 emphasizes that righteousness comes through faith, not through the law. Paul reinforces the principle that justification is based on faith alone.

The assertion that *“the righteous will live by faith”* highlights the centrality of faith in the believer’s life. It affirms that true righteousness is not a result of human effort but a gift from God, received through faith. This truth challenges any reliance on works and calls believers to trust wholly in God’s grace.

#### *The Nature of the Law*

Paul explains, *“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’”* This statement underscores the fundamental difference between the law and faith. The law demands perfect obedience, while faith relies on God’s grace. The nature of the law as a system of works contrasts sharply with the gospel’s message of grace. While the law requires adherence to a set of rules, the gospel invites believers to trust in the finished work of Christ. This distinction is crucial for understanding the basis of our salvation and the nature of our relationship with God.

#### *Christ’s Redemption*

Paul declares, *“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.’”* This reference to Deuteronomy 21:23 highlights Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, where He took upon Himself the curse of the law on our behalf. Christ’s redemption through His crucifixion is the heart of the gospel. It signifies the ultimate sacrifice, where Jesus took the penalty for our sins and liberated us from the curse of the law. This act of redemption underscores the depth of God’s incredible love and the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation.

#### *The Blessing of Abraham*

Paul concludes, *“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.”* This statement highlights the purpose of Christ’s redemption - to extend the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles and to enable believers to receive the Holy Spirit by faith.

The blessing of Abraham through Christ underscores the inclusivity and generosity of God’s plan. It affirms that the same blessings promised to Abraham are available to all who believe in Christ. This truth highlights the unity and diversity within the body of Christ, where all believers share in the same spiritual inheritance.

### **IV. Practical Applications for Our Lives**

As we reflect on Galatians 3:1-14, several practical applications emerge for our lives today.

#### *Embrace the Simplicity of Faith*

Paul’s rebuke of the Galatians challenges us to embrace the simplicity of faith in Christ. We must resist the temptation to add human effort or legalistic practices to the gospel. Our salvation and spiritual growth are rooted in faith, not in works. To embrace the simplicity of faith, we must focus on the core message of the gospel and rely on God’s grace for our salvation. This involves a continual trust in Christ’s finished work and a rejection of any attempts to earn God’s favour through our own efforts. By keeping our faith simple and focused on Christ, we can experience the fullness of God’s grace and live in the freedom He provides.

#### *Live Consistently with the Gospel*

Paul’s challenge to the Galatians to live consistently with the gospel calls us to examine our own lives for areas of inconsistency or hypocrisy. Our actions should align with our beliefs, and we should strive to live out the truth of the gospel in every aspect of our lives.

Living consistently with the gospel involves a commitment to integrity and authenticity. It means allowing the truth of the gospel to shape our attitudes, behaviours, and relationships. By living in a manner that reflects our faith, we bear witness to the transformative power of the gospel and inspire others to follow Christ.

### *Recognize the Futility of Legalism*

Paul's contrast between faith and the law underscores the futility of legalism. We must recognize that our righteousness before God cannot be achieved through human effort or adherence to religious rules. True righteousness comes through faith in Christ alone.

To recognize the futility of legalism, we must be vigilant in identifying and rejecting any legalistic tendencies in our own lives. This involves a continual reliance on God's grace and a rejection of any attempts to earn His favour through our works. By embracing the gospel of grace, we can experience the freedom and joy of living in God's love.

### *Rely on the Holy Spirit*

Paul's emphasis on receiving the Spirit through faith highlights the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit for our spiritual growth and empowerment. The Spirit's presence in our lives is a testimony to the effectiveness of faith and the inadequacy of the law.

Relying on the Holy Spirit involves cultivating a relationship with Him through prayer, worship, and obedience. It means seeking His guidance, listening to His voice, and allowing Him to work in and through us. By living in dependence on the Spirit, we can experience His power and presence in our daily lives.

### *Celebrate the Inclusivity of the Gospel*

Paul's teaching on the blessing of Abraham through faith emphasizes the inclusivity of the gospel. We must celebrate the unity and diversity within the body of Christ, recognizing that all believers, regardless of their background, are recipients of God's grace.

Celebrating the inclusivity of the gospel involves embracing the diversity within the church and seeking to build relationships with believers from different cultures and backgrounds. It means recognizing our shared identity in Christ and working together to advance His kingdom. By celebrating the inclusivity of the gospel, we reflect the heart of God and demonstrate the power of His love.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude our reflection on Galatians 3:1-14, we are reminded of the centrality of faith in the Christian life and the futility of relying on the works of the law. Paul's challenge to the Galatians to embrace the simplicity of faith, live consistently with the gospel, and rely on the Holy Spirit is a powerful message for us today.

Let us strive to live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us reject any attempts to earn God's favour through our efforts and instead rely on His grace for our salvation and our spiritual growth. May we celebrate the inclusivity of the gospel and work together to advance God's kingdom, reflecting His love and grace to the world.