

# Galatians 3

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## Faith Brings Righteousness (3:1-14)

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

- Paul called the Galatians “foolish” because they exchanged his pure gospel for the Judaizers false gospel of faith plus works.
- Not only were the Galatians foolish, but the Judaizers also “bewitched” them. This was like a witchdoctor casting a spell to influence someone negatively. The Judaizers false gospel persuaded the Galatians to add the works of the Law to their faith in Christ. This dangerous, deadly teaching was like a witchcraft curse. It put them under a spell, clouding their thinking with confusion and indecision.

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?

- The Galatians had a wonderful beginning. When Paul planted four churches in Galatia, they experienced an outpouring of the Spirit. Through the simple act of *hearing with faith*, the Spirit of God did signs, wonders, and miracles. Many in Galatia were saved.
- The Galatians complete turnabout doesn’t even make sense. They received the Spirit by *hearing with faith*. Logically, they should have also lived by the Spirit through *hearing with faith*. But a bewitching spell of false teaching deluded them. The poisonous teaching of legalism persuaded them to exchange *hearing with faith* for *the works of the Law*.
- Bewitched and deceived, the Galatians thought it was necessary to obey the 613 commandments of the Law to be right with God and to live a holy life.

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

4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

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 began by the Spirit through *hearing with faith*. The Spirit saved them. The Spirit justified them. The Spirit came to dwell within them. The Spirit did miracles. All by hearing the gospel and responding with faith.
- But the legalistic Judaizers went to them and said, “You can’t really be right with God (justified) if you don’t receive circumcision. You can’t really be right with God if you don’t obey His Law. Nor can you be holy if you fail to keep all 613 of His commandments.”
- The Judaizers bewitching spell, through this false teaching, caused a complete turnabout. The Galatians exchanged *hearing with faith* for *the works of the Law*. They were now trying to be *perfected by the flesh*.
- What, exactly, were they doing? They were trying to become holy by commandment-keeping. By willpower and self-determination, they were exerting all of their self-effort to obey the entire Law.

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- Paul's reasoning cuts right through the malaise caused by this false teaching. He basically said, "If you began by the Spirit and it was glorious, why would you strive to be perfected by the flesh? The way you start is the way you should live until you reach the heavenly finish line."
- The Law requires human achievement. The gospel depends upon Christ's achievement. The Law makes demands and bids us to obey. The gospel makes promises and bids us to believe. The Law is all about us gritting our teeth, striving to please God by our obedience. The gospel is all about Christ's Spirit coming to dwell within us and Him living Christ's life in us and through us—giving us the power to obey.

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

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

- One of Paul's favorite teachings was justification by faith. Often, he taught this by using Abraham as an example. Abraham believed God, apart from any works of obedience, and God reckoned Him righteous. God imputed His righteousness to Abraham's spiritual bank account, reckoning Abraham righteous through faith. Paul explained this concept in Romans 4, devoting an entire chapter to fully develop this teaching.
- The word *reckoned* means imputed. Through faith in Jesus Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us and we are therefore reckoned to be just as righteous as Christ. This is our legal position.
- In the New Covenant, Jesus is our covenant representative. All that is true of Christ, as our representative, is legally true of us. In God's eyes, Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us so that we are reckoned to be righteous.
- Imagine a 16-year old girl driving without a license. She's given a ticket. But since she is listed under her parent's insurance, guess what happens? Her parent's insurance goes up. Her violation is imputed to her parents' account. Her parents are reckoned to have driven without a license even though they didn't personally violate the law.
- Similarly, when we put our faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law—apart from what we do for God—the Father imputes the righteousness of Christ to us and reckons us righteous. This is our legal position. This is the basis for how God deals with us.
- Though our spirits were instantly made righteous when we were born again, our souls and bodies are initially unaffected by our regeneration (Eph. 4:24). That means we are legally righteous and one-third of us is actually righteous, but our souls and bodies are still polluted and defiled by sin and selfishness.
- For the rest of our lives, the Lord targets our souls and bodies for a deep work of sanctification. He seeks to align our living condition with our legal position. He wants to conform our minds, will, emotions, desires, and bodily appetites to the image of His Son. He works relentlessly to transform us fully into Christ's image and likeness.
- Paul also made a loaded statement. One that he repeated often in his teachings. The *sons of Abraham* are Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus Christ.
- Abraham had two types of descendants. Descendants after the flesh—the Jewish people. And descendants born of the Spirit—Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ.
- In Genesis 22:17, the Lord said to Abraham, "I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore."

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- The *stars of heaven* refer to Abraham's spiritual descendants. The *sand which is on the seashore* refers to natural Jews.
- In making this statement, we must beware of two types of replacement theology. The first is the church replacing Israel in God's prophetic plans. The prophetic promises in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were not made to the church. They were made to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. Most of these will be fulfilled when Christ returns, sets up His kingdom in Jerusalem, and rules the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:6).
- The second form of replacement theology is the Jews replacing Christ and His people. The Jewish people, who are not in Christ, are enemies of the gospel according to Paul. A great example is the Judaizers who were troubling the Galatians. Only those grafted into the rich root of the olive tree, Jesus Christ, are partakers of the New Covenant promises—whether Jew or Gentile (Rom. 11:17-27). These are Abraham's spiritual sons and daughters—the stars of heaven, as the Lord told Abraham when he cut covenant with him.

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."

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

- The blessings of Abraham are much more than a piece of land in the Middle East. Much more than making people healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- The gospel is the ultimate blessing of Abraham and Christ is the seed to whom the promises were ultimately made—not Isaac.

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."

- If you embrace the Law and live under the Law, you are under a curse. The Scripture is clear. If you are living under the Law, you must always keep the 613 commandments of the Law. Else you are a law-breaker.
- Living under the Law, if at any time you break one of the commandments, you have broken the entire Law. Imagine a Jewish man who obeyed 612 commandments, but in a moment of weakness, went by Bucky's BBQ for a pulled pork sandwich. This minor offense would render him guilty of breaking the entire Law.
- Whoever broke the Law came under a curse. Not a curse from the devil. A curse from God. You can read about the terrible curses of the Law in Deuteronomy 28-29. Some of the curses were poverty, various types of mental and physical sickness, physical and spiritual barrenness, oppression, removal of God's protection, and plagues.

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

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

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- Because we have a sin nature imparted to us from Adam’s disobedience, no person in history has ever kept all 613 commandments of the Law internally and externally. No person in history can claim they are in right standing with God by their meticulous obedience to God’s commandments.
- Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 a few times in his epistles. This verse states, “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”
- Even if we obeyed all 613 commandments with meticulous precision, internally we would not be righteous because we still have a sin nature. The only way to be righteous and live righteously is to live by faith. To live by faith in what Christ has already finished for us on the cross and what He is finishing in us by the Spirit.
- The Law is not of faith. The Law basically requires us to grit our teeth, clench our fists, and through pure willpower do what God says. If we live this way, we are under the Law and are under a curse.

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”—

- What a precious and beautiful promise! Jesus Christ set us free from the curse of the Law. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God delivers us from the curses contained in the Law—all those terrible curses described in Deuteronomy 28-29.
- This means God no longer places curses on us for disobeying His commandments. God no longer releases sickness, poverty, oppression, and barrenness if we fail to meticulously obey His commandments. If you eat at the seafood buffet, you don’t have to worry about God striking you with poverty or sickness. Praise God!
- However, some take this wonderful promise to an unbiblical extreme and teach that God no longer judges His people. That is a false teaching.
- So, what’s the difference between being redeemed from the curse of the Law and God’s judgments?
- To keep it short, here’s the difference:

Curse of the Law	God’s Judgment
Retribution for violating the covenant	Fatherly discipline for prolonged sin and disobedience
Unredemptive punishment	Redemptive child training
Become God’s enemy	Remain God’s child as He trains you through correction to become His mature son

- As a loving Father, God’s judgments toward us are the least severe means possible to bring us to the deepest level of love, maturity, and Christlikeness.

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.

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- The indwelling Spirit is the ultimate blessing of Abraham, far greater than health, wealth, and influence. The same Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells within us. It's hard to beat this glorious blessing.

## The Intent of the Law (3:15-22)

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.

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.

- What an important statement! The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Not seeds in the plural. Not ultimately to Isaac. God was making His covenant promises to Christ.
- All the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).
- Jesus Christ is the rich root of the olive tree described in Romans 11. He is the One whom Jews and Gentiles must be grafted into to be blessed.
- He is also Israel—the Jewish Man to whom God made all the promises in the prophets (Isa. 49:3).

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.

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.

- The Abrahamic Covenant was far greater than the promised land and physical blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant, made 430 before the Law, was looking to the Messiah, the gospel, and the indwelling Spirit.
- In essence, Paul said to the Galatians, "If the Abrahamic Covenant, which ultimately looked to Christ, the gospel, and the indwelling Spirit, came 430 years before the Law, why do you want to live under the Law? It makes no sense."

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 would come to whom the promise had been made.

- The natural question arises, "Why is the Law even necessary?"
- Paul said the Law was given because of transgressions. The Law was given to preserve a remnant until the Messiah came.
- This statement reaches back to the Genesis 3:15 prophecy, which stated, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."
- This goes all the way back to Seth and his lineage. These men and women wanted to live righteously and preserve a righteous lineage until the Messiah came. Looking at Seth's family tree, it produced some great men of God, such as Enoch. But slowly, through compromise, there was only one person who walked

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righteously before the Lord—Noah. If God didn't destroy the wicked with His judgments, then the Genesis 3:15 prophecy would have been aborted and His ultimate intention would have been nullified.

- The Law was given to keep a people set apart and sanctified until “the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.” Genesis 3:15 is in view here. The Law was the absolute best that God could do to keep a people set apart from compromise and defilement. The Law was the duct tape God used to bring forth the Messiah through a righteous remnant.
- As mentioned in the introduction, think about how the dietary laws kept the Israelites separate from the nations. The stringent requirements in the dietary laws naturally separated and isolated the Israelites from their polytheistic neighbors. This helped preserve the Jewish people and kept them sanctified until the Messiah came.
- The Law also defined transgression so the Israelites were not corrupted by their pagan, heathenistic, demon-worshipping Gentile neighbors.
- The Lord, not wanting to wipe out the world again as in the days of Noah, gave the Law to preserve a righteous remnant who would bring forth the Messiah. This was the best He could do apart from the finished work of the cross and the indwelling Spirit.

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

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.

22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

- The Law is not contrary to God's promises, which came first. The Law was given to preserve a righteous remnant until Christ came.
- The external commandments are unable to impart life. Here we see one of God's ultimate intentions. The impartation of God's life. His *zoe* life!
- The Law's external commandments had no power to impart life or righteousness into the spirit, heart, and soul of God's people. The Law could only tell you what was right and wrong. It could only detail what God expected of you. But it had no inherent power to give you the ability to obey. Nor could it change your nature internally.