

True Life
September 16, 2018
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Galatians 3:1-14

Opening: Let's take a poll, does receiving a gift from someone come easy to you or does it make you a little uncomfortable? Why might receiving a gift make you feel uncomfortable? What might you do in response to that discomfort?

What problem in the churches in Galatia caused Paul to write this urgent letter? What is legalism in the context of faith? Why is it alluring?

- In Galatians 3 Paul argues against the false teaching of the Judaizers with a series of rhetorical questions for the Galatian Christians to ponder.
- First he asked them about their own personal salvation experience.
- Then (because our faith should be based on scripture and not just our experience) he used some Old Testament verses to make them think.
- From scripture he showed they were just as righteous as Abraham because they were saved by faith in the same way Abraham was.

Big Idea: If we can be as righteous as our Old Testament heroes and not have to earn it, who would be foolish enough try to work for our salvation?

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 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 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith -

- Verse one: The word foolish here means “spiritually dull.” When Paul left these young converts they “got it,” they understood clearly that salvation comes only by grace through faith in Christ not through good deeds and rule-keeping. Something took them from spiritually sharp to dull.
- It was someONE that “bewitched” or cast a spell on them (i.e. hypnosis.)
- Paul said the message of Jesus crucified for our sins was right before their eyes when they were saved.
- Paul asked in verse two: *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.”* *“After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?”*ⁱⁱ How foolish can you be?
- Paul was there with them when they trusted in Christ and received the Holy Spirit to live inside them. He asked them, *“Did you have to work for the Holy Spirit? Was your salvation experience all for nothing?”*
- He was showing them just how ridiculous this false teaching of salvation by rule keeping was.
- If we can be righteous and not have to earn it, who would be foolish enough try to work for our salvation?
- Paul didn’t just stop with reminding them of their own personal experience; as we said faith should be judged on scripture not just experience.
- The Judaizers were all about the Old Testament and their Hebrew fathers. They were all about the law of Moses. So Paul goes even further back in history to the great patriarch of Israel, Abraham. Look at verse six:

⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- Paul was quoting Genesis 15:6, Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous. **Why is that verse good news for you and me today?**
- Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous. That's the same simple gospel message given to you and me in Romans 10:9 (ESV) "*...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*"
- **If Jesus hadn't come to earth, died, and been raised to life yet, how could Abraham's salvation be the same as ours?** [<https://www.gotquestions.org/Old-Testament-salvation.html>]
- We naturally tend to place the heroes of the Bible on a pedestal because scripture holds them up as examples. But they were human like you and me. Their special place in scripture came from their relationship with God.
- Scripture doesn't say Abraham earned his righteousness.
- The fact is, Abraham lived 400 years BEFORE God gave Moses the 10 Commandments.
- He wasn't saved by the law but by faith.
- You, me, the Galatians, Jews and Gentiles are all saved the same way Abraham was: by faith - confessing, believing, and receiving this free gift.
- If we can be as righteous as our Old Testament heroes and not have to earn it, who would be foolish enough try to work for our salvation?
- Paul continued to use scripture to show that law keeping is not only frustrating it's IMPOSSIBLE. No one can successfully keep the law.

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

- Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26 to prove that trying to earn righteousness by keeping the law isn't possible. The law was given to expose our sin problem but it can't fix our sin problem.
- Romans 3:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

- If we can't be successful in keeping the law then we're cursed and condemned. How will we ever be justified and made righteous?

¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

- Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 *"the righteous shall live by faith."* That's so significant it is quoted again in Romans and Hebrews.
- **What does that verse mean for you and me?**
- Look at the context of Habakkuk 2:4:
 - NKJV - ⁴ "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith."ⁱⁱⁱ
 - NLT - ⁴ "Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked."^{iv}
- In other words, self-righteousness may be an attitude but it's an oxymoron. Proud, arrogant, *"I'll do it myself"* people don't get it.
- The only way to be justified (found not guilty by God) is by faith.
- In verses 13 and 14 Paul ties it all together linking Old Testament scripture with the work of Christ on the cross. If we're guilty of breaking God's law then someone had to pay the price.

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 hanged on a tree"—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- If we can be as righteous as our Old Testament heroes and not have to earn it, who would be foolish enough try to work for our salvation?
- Salvation is only by grace and through faith plus NOTHING we DO.
- Let's close with a reminder about another trap of legalism.
- Instead of the legalism of the Judaizers, we would call this the legalism of the Pharisees. *"It's the tendency to measure spirituality by a list of manmade rules...At the root of*

Pharisaical legalism is a belief that holiness is achieved by legal means—living one’s life by rigorous rules and restrictions...” of law, an attempt to make law do work that only grace can do. Like the Judaizer’s brand of legalism, it brings people under a yoke of bondage Scripture has not placed on them.”^v

- Adding anything to Jesus’ work on the cross for salvation is the legalism of the Judaizers. Adding anything to holiness that’s not in scripture is the rule-keeping legalism of the Pharisees. Paul covered this in Colossians:

Colossians 2:20–23 (NLT) ²⁰ You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ²¹ “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”? ²² Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. ²³ These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.

- Just as we shouldn’t let anyone “bewitch” us about salvation by works, we shouldn’t allow anyone to intimidate us into thinking that sanctification is by keeping man-made rules that are NOT in scripture.
- That’s why sanctification is called “growing in grace” and not perfection in rule keeping. Here’s a good rule of thumb: *“The ultimate goal for the Christian should be to glorify God, edify fellow believers, and have a good reputation before unbelievers.”^{vi}*

• As Paul wrote later in Galatians 5: Galatians 5:13 (NLT) ¹³ For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ga 3:2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ga 3:3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Hab 2:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Hab 2:4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^v Phil Johnson in Law and Liberty: A Biblical Look at Legalism
^{vi} <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-liberty.html>