

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE IS RECEIVED BY FAITH ALONE

Galatians 3:1-9

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

How would you characterize the emotion that Paul is expressing at the beginning of Galatians 3:1? Have you ever spoken to anyone with this kind of language and emotion? When would you talk like this?

In this opening statement we detect Paul's zeal for the truth of the gospel and his compassion for these people. Paul is not being spiteful or insulting them because he is feeling rejected by them. Rather, it is out of his fatherly zeal for their well-being that he so strongly and sternly reprimands them. His strong language is born out of his passion for the glory of Christ and for their eternal well-being. What Paul aims to do in these nine verses is to show them why their embracing the message that they must obey the Law in order to be right with God is so illogical. They know better than this and he is out to prove to them that they are fools to believe God will save them based upon what they do. He aims to prove to them that God does not give anyone any of the benefits of salvation based upon how they live their lives but on the basis of their faith in Christ.

STUDY

1. How does the fact that he spent his time with them preaching that Jesus was crucified prove they are foolish and bewitched? (Compare with 2:21)

What Paul did in his preaching was to show that the crucified Christ is the only Savior of sinners. Paul says that he did everything in his power to portray the death of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the law and the only hope of salvation. The point of reminding them that the crucified Christ is the heart of his message is because of what he said in 2:21. If right standing with God is gained by obedience to the law

then why in the world did Jesus Christ die? And, Paul would say, you know that he died because his death was the subject of my preaching to you. I painted the picture of his death by my preaching as clearly as is humanly possible because righteousness cannot come by law keeping but only by Christ's death. If law-keeping is what saves you then that is what I would have talked about but I didn't talk about the law or law-keeping because it is Christ's death that makes us righteous, not obeying the law of Moses.

2. What are the Galatians preoccupied with? What does Paul think they ought to be preoccupied with?

The Galatians were busy thinking about the Law of Moses, their need to be circumcised, the kinds of food they ought to eat, who they could associate with and how they were going to keep the moral law, etc. Paul tells them they are foolish when he was so clear in showing them that the cross of Christ was to be the center of their attention. They are not to be preoccupied with what they are doing but with what Christ has done for them by his substitutionary death.

3. What occupies your attention? What do you spend more time thinking about, what you are doing or what Christ has done?

All the benefits of God's salvation are given to those who believe without any regard to how they live because Christ died to secure these benefits for believers only.

4. Compare 3:2 with 2:16. What is always true of every person whom God justifies (declares not guilty but perfectly righteous)?

Every person who is justified, that is declared not guilty but perfectly righteous by faith in Christ also has received the Holy Spirit in all of his fullness. Those who would teach that the giving of the Holy Spirit is something separate from justification are shown to be false teachers by this text. There is only one kind of Christian, the justified, Spirit baptized kind. We know that because in v. 2 he uses exactly the same language as he used back in 2:16. We are not justified by observing the law but by faith in Christ and so here we receive the Holy Spirit,

not by observing the law but by believing what we heard, Christ died for us. At the moment we are justified, we receive the Holy Spirit.

5. Read Acts 10:43-48. Did the Gentile Cornelius and his Gentile household receive the Holy Spirit because they started obeying the law or because they believed the message of Peter?

Cornelius and his household received forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit by faith, not by law keeping. This is the same thing that Paul says happened to the Galatian Christians. Therefore, why in the world would they go back to law keeping when the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives was not because of law keeping.

6. According to John 14:16-27 & Romans 8:9-16 what are some of the things that are true for all who have “received” the Holy Spirit?

Jesus has come to live within us by his Spirit. God the Father is living in us by the Spirit. We are receiving the truth about Jesus and all he has done for us by the work of the Spirit. We receive the peace of Jesus by his Spirit. The presence of the Spirit is proof positive that we belong to Jesus. Our spirit is alive because of the life-giving Spirit who lives within us. We know that the Spirit will raise our bodies from the dead. We are putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. We are led by the Spirit. We are not slaves to fear but full of confidence that we are God’s children and therefore have nothing to fear.

7. According to v. 3 what shows the foolishness of the Galatians? (Literal translation of v. 3 is this: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by means of the Spirit are you now being brought to completion by means of the flesh (that is, your natural ability to obey the law)?”)

They began their Christian life by the work of the Holy Spirit. By believing that they must keep the law in addition to trusting Christ they are acting as though their living as Christians and remaining Christians is dependent upon their ability to keep the law, not upon the Holy Spirit’s enabling power. Paul is using the same argument here that Jesus used with Nicodemus in John 3 when he told him that only those born again by the Spirit of God would enter the kingdom of

heaven. He said, that “flesh (human effort) gives birth to flesh (that which is merely human) but that the “Spirit (work of regeneration that makes dead men alive, see Titus 3:1-6, John 16:6-15, etc.) gives birth to Spirit (God’s divine, eternal life dwelling within, a new heart in the language of Ezekiel 36). The main point of Paul is this: since you did nothing to give yourself spiritual life in the first place, it was entirely a work of sovereign grace by the Holy Spirit, what makes you think that you are going to be able to live this divine, supernatural life by human effort which is what the law is entirely based upon? Paul is saying that it is not only justification that is entirely a work of grace apart from human effort but that sanctification is entirely a work of grace, though in a different way, not in declaring righteous but enabling us to progressively live righteous.

8. How are you attempting to live the Christian life? Which occupies your attention more: keeping rules or growing in your trust in, love for and delight with Jesus Christ? See 2 Cor 3:16-18.

9. According to v. 5 what shows the foolishness of the Galatians? (Compare with 1 Cor. 12:4-11 and 1 Peter 4:9-11)

The third thing Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit does for every believer but not for those who are seeking to obey the law is he enables us to serve the body of Christ by giving us his gifts. God supplies us with the Holy Spirit and thus with his entire miracle working capability. These powerful works of the Holy Spirit are the gifts he distributes throughout his body for the manifestation of his presence to his people by our serving of one another. The Holy Spirit gives us the power and the will to work for the good of others in a vast variety of ways. He does this only for those who trust in Christ, not for those who depend on the keeping of the law to be made right with God.

10. What tends to happen to the fellowship of churches when the focus is upon keeping rules rather than upon serving one another in love in accord with the gifts the Spirit has given?

If keeping the law is what you are focused upon then you spend your time judging the performance of others rather than using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to serve the needs of others. Law keeping divides

people from one another while the Holy Spirit unites people around the crucified Christ. The Holy Spirit motivates and enables loving service while law-keeping promotes a self-righteousness and dissension.

11. What occupies your attention more, how other Christians are doing in living like Christians or how you can serve and help other Christians know and love Christ more?

12. According to v. 4 what shows the foolishness of the Galatians? How is this related to the surrounding commentary on the work of the Holy Spirit (see John 15:18-21, 26-27 & Acts 1:8, 4:18-21)?

In John 15 Jesus says that the non-Christian world will hate us because it hated him and we love him. How does the world know that we trust and love Jesus Christ? Well, when the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ to us and we discover him as our glorious Savior and Lord we cannot help but let others know about him. As Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses...” As we bear witness to Christ by our lives and words, while some believe and join us in worshipping Christ, many will hate us and cause us to suffer. This is what happened to the Galatian Christians at their conversion.

Now Paul’s question to them is simply this: When you abandon faith in Christ and embrace law-keeping, then you are treating all of your suffering for the name of Christ at the beginning of your Christian life as if it were a waste of time. It’s like what we would say to the college student who tells us in the second semester of their senior year that they are going to drop out of school, “What, you’re going to waste all that work and time and money? How can you treat all that suffering as if it was for no purpose? How can you quit when you have already given up so much to get this far?” That is what Paul is saying to the Galatians. How can you throw away all that you have lost because of your bold witness for Christ enabled by the Holy Spirit? Keep going in the Spirit so that you can receive the reward for which you endured the loss of so much.

13. What are some of the pleasures you have “lost” by becoming a Christian and some of the suffering you have “gained”?

All the benefits of God’s salvation are given to those who believe without any regard to how they live because the Holy Spirit is given to apply these benefits to believers only.

14. What is the right answer to the question Paul asks in v. 5?

God supplies the Holy Spirit and works miracles among us because we believe the gospel, not because we obey the law.

15. Verse 6 literally says, “Even as (Just as) Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” In what way is the Holy Spirit’s being given to Christians and Abraham being declared righteous the same thing?

Their believing the gospel and thus receiving the Holy Spirit is exactly the same as when Abraham believed God’s promise in Genesis 15 that he, a childless, 80 year old man with a barren, 70 year old wife was going to have as many descendants as the stars in heaven and on the basis of his faith, apart from any works, God counted him as righteous. God declared Abraham righteous, not because he did anything but because he believed God’s promise. This is the same thing God does when he gives the Holy Spirit and his miracle working power to Christians on the basis of their faith in Christ, not because they have done something or obeyed some law.

16. Why does Paul bring up Abraham and what God tells Abraham in Genesis 15:6? (HINT: The false teachers in Galatia are telling the Gentiles they must be circumcised to be part of God’s family and God commanded Abraham and thus all Jews to circumcise all their male children at 8 days old in Genesis 17.)

Since Genesis 17 every male descendant of Abraham has been circumcised in obedience to God’s command to do so. Therefore, it is the argument of the false teachers that if a Gentile wants to share in the blessings that God has promised to Abraham and his descendants then he must be circumcised. If you want the salvation that God has

promised to the Jews then become like a Jew by being circumcised. However, Paul goes back before God's command to Abraham to circumcise all the males in his household in Genesis 17 to what God said to Abraham in Genesis 15. Thus, it was not circumcision that made Abraham righteous but rather his trust in God's promise. Therefore when the false teachers are telling you to be circumcised or God won't accept you, then they are denying what God said to Abraham in Gen. 15:6, righteousness is given on the basis of faith, not circumcision.

17. According to vv. 7-10 who are the people who are the descendants of Abraham? Why would this be shocking thing to say?

He says that those who believe God's promise, like Abraham believed God's promise, are Abraham's true sons and daughters. It is not those who are physically circumcised or racially descended from Abraham or who obey the law of Moses who are his children. This is exactly the opposite of what the false teachers have been telling them. They have been saying that if a Gentile wants to inherit all the blessings promised to Abraham, then they must be circumcised and keep the laws God gave to Abraham's children through Moses. That's why he commands them at the beginning of v. 7 to "understand" that only those who trust in the promise of God, like Abraham, are the sons and daughters of Abraham.

You might be saying, well who cares if I am a child of Abraham? Verses 9-10 tell us why it is that we should care whether or not we are descendants of Abraham. Paul goes back to Genesis 12, to the beginning of the Jewish nation when God chose an idol worshipping Aramean, named Abram. He promised this man, without any condition or stipulation that he was going to make him into a great nation and that, as Paul quotes here, "In him and with him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." Genesis 1-11 is a description of the chaos that has come into the world as a result of human sin and of God's graciously continuing to sustain human beings in spite of sin. Genesis 12:1-3 is the turning point in the story. Here we discover God beginning his plan to bring his people back to himself, into a state of blessing, back to the Garden of Eden. Abraham stands as the representative of those God redeems. He declares that it is through

Abraham and his descendants that God's salvation will come to all the peoples of the world. This promise of blessing in, with and through Abraham is the promise of the coming of Christ as the Redeemer of God's people and the promise that redemption will be given to those who believe, like Abraham. The only people who belong to the people of God, the only people who are going to return to the renewed Garden of Eden, the new heavens and the new earth are those who believe God's promise, like Abraham did. In Genesis 12:3 the Scriptures are declaring the means by which both Jews and Gentiles will be included in the people of God. Jews and Gentiles are included in the company of those going to heaven by their faith in Christ, not because they have done something. These and these alone are declared not guilty but perfectly righteous, just like Abraham, the man of faith.

18. Are you a "child of Abraham?" How do you know? What are some of the benefits (blessings) that you possess because you are a child of Abraham? (See 2 Corinthians 1:20)

All the benefits of God's salvation are given to those who believe without any regard to how they live because God the Father promised these benefits to believers only.