

Paul's letter to the Galatians



Important Examples of Justification by Faith

Galatians 3:1-14



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Paul appealed to their salvation experience (3:1)

- **“foolish”** (*anoētos*) ~ not exercising the mind to think, ponder, or consider. The Galatians failed to carefully consider and evaluate what they were hearing.
- The Judaizers had been persuasive in promoting the Law of Moses, but their appealing manner was no reason to accept the content of their message as true.
- Paul and Barnabas had **“publicly portrayed”** Christ as crucified on behalf of sinners. The Galatians themselves knew that God did something for us which we could not do for ourselves in order to give us a gift that we do not deserve.

Salvation by faith or law-keeping? (3:2-3)

- Paul forced the Galatians to think about their own experience of receiving their salvation. Obedience to the Law of Moses was never presented as a requirement, so they did not “**receive the Spirit by works of the Law**” but “**by hearing with faith.**”
- Through faith, they had also received the new birth of regeneration provided by the Holy Spirit. Since they had “**begun by the Spirit**” rather than by legalistic works, fleshly rule-following would not help them to live the Christian life.
- A person who depends on the “**flesh**” is trying to come to God on his own terms, in his own way, and in his own strength.

Spiritual power by faith or law-keeping? (3:4-5)

- Paul warned them that they would eventually suffer for the truth that salvation is by faith alone (Acts 14:22), but would that suffering be “**in vain**?” If obeying the Mosaic Law would bring relief from persecution, should they abandon God’s grace?
- Solely on the basis of their faith, they received the gift of regeneration to new life through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and God did mighty works in their midst.
- These “works of power” were *not* done by the Judaizers who insisted on works of the Law.

The example of Abraham's faith (3:6)

- **“even so”** ~ The Galatians received their salvation by faith alone, and Abraham had been reckoned as righteous in exactly the same way (Genesis 15:6).
- **“reckoned”** (*logizomai*) ~ an accounting term that describes something being credited to one's account. Abraham was counted as righteous solely on the basis of his faith in God's promise.
- The Judaizers may have stressed the importance of their ancestral connection to Abraham, but the example of Abraham's salvation only proved that justification has always come by faith alone.

Abraham's heirs are those of like faith (3:7)

- The Judaizers taught that the natural descendants of Abraham were his children and were accepted by God as being righteous because of their obedience to the Law.
- **“those who are of faith”** ~ Paul insists that it is not the physical lineage of Abraham that counts, but true **“sons of Abraham”** are those who demonstrate his same kind of faith in God.
- Physical ancestry does *not* guarantee salvation. Even Jesus said that the true sons of Abraham are those who do what Abraham did (John 8:39). True sons by faith in God are heirs to the blessings God promised to Abraham.

All nations will be blessed through Abraham (3:8-9)

- Paul will cite specific Scriptures which the Law-abiding Judaizers were compelled to accept as proof of the points he was making.
- In God's divine foresight and eternal plan for the salvation of humanity, He determined to **"justify the Gentiles by faith,"** which is exactly the same way that Abraham had been declared righteous (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6).
- The good news to Abraham was that **"ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU"** (Gen 12:3). **"Those who are of faith"** are blessed together with believing Abraham because they trust in God rather than by relying on obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Failure to keep the entire Law incurs a curse (3:10-12)

- Anyone attempting to merit acceptance with God by perfectly measuring up to His holy standards will face an impossible task.
- The Law demanded perfection, but a curse was incurred by failing to continually keep every part of it (Deut 27:26).
- **“no one is justified by the Law before God”** (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:8). Instead, **“the righteous man shall live by faith”** (Habakkuk 2:4).
- But the Law does not require any faith. It only requires obedience to its regulations (Leviticus 18:5).
- ***Faith*** and ***Law*** are mutually exclusive principles. The *Law* demands ***doing***, but *Faith* receives as a gift what God has already ***done***.

Christ dealt with the law-breakers' curse (3:13-14)

- “**Christ redeemed us**” (*exagorazō*) ~ to pay the price in order to reclaim something from someone else's control.
- He did this by becoming a curse “**for us**” (*huper*) ~ “on our behalf” or “in our place.” Jesus was “**hanged on a tree**” ~ Even though He had not incurred a curse of His own, by submitting Himself to crucifixion He bore our curse on that tree.
- Christ's death provided a way for the “**all nations**” clause of the Abrahamic Covenant to be fulfilled (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 26:4). Salvation's blessings are granted by faith, apart from works of the Law, so they are freely available to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Summary

- The Galatians were “**foolish**” because they were not thinking clearly and exercising discernment. Their own salvation experience testified to the fact that they received the Holy Spirit by faith alone, rather than by works of the Law.
- Even Abraham had been justified by faith alone apart from works of the Law. It is only those who follow his example of faith who will receive the promised blessings offered to people of all nations.
- In order for God to declare law-breakers as righteous, Christ had to deal with the curse that rested upon all of sinful humanity.

The curse He bore was not His own, but ours.