

Galatians 3:1-14 ~ Faith or observance of the law? ~ Discussion Questions

Review: The Judaizers accused Paul of allowing Gentile converts to ignore the law so that he would be more popular with them. Paul, in turn, accused them of nullifying the power of Jesus' sacrifice by adding conditions for salvation. The question they debated was: Does salvation come through Christ alone or does it come through Christ *and* adherence to the law?

1. Paul begins this chapter with "You foolish Galatians!" How would you react if Billy Graham or Tony Evans began a letter to your church like that?

2. In verse 1, Paul suggests that the Galatian believers have been bewitched (by Satan?) and reminds them that, in contrast, Jesus was "portrayed as crucified." Why do you think the Galatians might have been so interested in the teachings of these false teachers? (Acts 8:9-11 and 13:6-7)

3. What rhetorical question did Paul ask? (3:2)

4. In verse 3, Paul again calls his readers foolish and reminds them that, although they have received the Spirit, they are still trying to please God by observing the law. Can you think of any ways in which you try to please God by doing something other than focusing on Him and your relationship with Him?

5. How can we tell the difference between the religion-driven things that we do and those that are faith-driven?

6. What does Paul say about Abraham in verses 6-9? Why do you think he chose him as an example? (Genesis 15:6, 18:18-19, 22:18, Habakkuk 2:4, Heb 10:38)

7. In verses 10-12, Paul quotes three Old Testament passages (Deut 27:26, Habakkuk 2:4, Leviticus 18:5). What do these OT passages tell us about the law?

8. In 3:13, how does Jesus solve the problem presented by attempting to live by the law? (Deuteronomy 21:23, Romans 4:9, 4:16, Acts 2:33)

9. Trying to be right with God (justified) by our own effort doesn't work. Good intentions such as "I'll do better next time" or "I'll never do that again" usually end in failure. How can we break this cycle of failure?

Galatians 3:1-14 ~ Faith or observance of the law? ~ Leader's Guide

Review: The Judaizers accused Paul of allowing Gentile converts to ignore the law so that he would be more popular with them. Paul, in turn, accused them of nullifying the power of Jesus' sacrifice by adding conditions for salvation. The question they debated was: Does salvation come through Christ alone or does it come through Christ *and* adherence to the law?

1. Paul begins this chapter with "You foolish Galatians!" How would you react if Billy Graham or Tony Evans began a letter to your church like that?

Generally using sarcasm or belittling your readers is not a good way to win him or her over to your point of view. On the other hand, you might want to consider that if someone close to you displayed a lack of knowledge about a subject that you knew well, what would you do about it? Your answer would probably vary depending upon the relationship between you. Consider: father to young son, father to teenager, father to 40-year-old son, teacher to pupil, two new friends, two old friends. How about these more sticky ones: 20-year-old son to father, employee to boss, hairdresser to customer, anyone at all to a lawyer.

2. In verse 1, Paul suggests that the Galatian believers have been bewitched (by Satan?) and reminds them that, in contrast, Jesus was "portrayed as crucified." Why do you think the Galatians might have been so interested in the teachings of these false teachers? (Acts 8:9-11 and 13:6-7)

Note, Paul did not say or mean literal witchcraft, but rather he said "bewitched," ("evil spell" in the NLT) meaning enticing arguments. The modern-day equivalent would be having the wool pulled over your eyes.

Who's the 2nd most popular comedian in the world today? Jeff Dunham, who combines ventriloquism, a sort of magic, with stand-up comedy, sells out every tour, has best-selling DVDs, and scored the two highest ratings in Comedy Central history. And what are the most popular acts in Las Vegas? David Copperfield, Siegfried and Roy, and Penn & Teller, magicians all. People love this stuff.

Acts 8:9-11 – Simon the Sorcerer – ⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

Acts 13:6-7 – ⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

These Galatians had not seen the actual crucifixion, so Paul says, “Jesus was clearly *portrayed* as crucified,” i.e., Christ’s death and its meaning was made as clear to you as if you *had* seen a picture of it. By who? By Paul himself. Paul’s proclamation of the Good News clearly portrayed Christ’s death and explained its significance (Romans 10:14-17, 1 Cor 1:18-24, esp v. 23, and 2:2. 1 Cor 1:23 – but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,). As he goes on, Paul contrasts his preaching of the crucified Christ with the rhetorical use of false arguments by his opponents.

3. What rhetorical question did Paul ask? (3:2)

A rhetorical question is one asked to make a statement rather than to obtain an answer; it is one expressed in terms intended to persuade. So here Paul is continuing his argument from the preceding chapters by asking pointedly whether the Galatians received the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses or by believing the message you heard about Christ?

4. In v 3, Paul again calls his readers foolish and reminds them that, although they have received the Spirit, they are still trying to please God by observing the law. Can you think of any ways in which you try to please God by doing something other than focusing on Him and your relationship with Him?

Here, Paul again upbraids the Galatians again for being “foolish.” It is not their lack of intelligence that riles Paul, but their lack of discernment.

By the way, don’t read this question and take it to mean that we should *not* follow the law or *not* try to please God with our actions. In Deuteronomy, God lays out how he wants us to behave toward him: fear me, worship me, love me, follow my ways, obey my commands. But what Paul is saying is that people are trying to achieve righteousness or become perfect in God’s sight by human effort, by trying to obey the law of Moses.

Back to the question above: what have you done or do you do to try and please God? Go on a missions trip? Let your enemy in the buffet line ahead of you? Help clean up after a church service? Deliberately not pass along gossip and think to yourself how “good” you are in God’s eyes?

5. How can we tell the difference between the religion-driven things that we do and those that are faith-driven?

Many churches, especially Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and Orthodox, have ritualistic responsive readings as part of the service, for example, P: The Lord be with you, C: and with thy spirit.

P: Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God. C: It is meet and right so to do.

P: He is present to save the lost. C: He is present to restore.

P: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. C: But fools despise wisdom and instruction. Are these religion-driven or faith-driven?

6. What does Paul say about Abraham in verses 6-9? Why do you think he chose him as an example? (Genesis 15:6, 18:18-19, 22:18, Hab 2:4, Heb 10:38)

Genesis 15:6 – Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 18:18-19 – ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

Genesis 22:18 – and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

First of all, OT quotations are recognized and people from the OT and have credibility. There are 224 direct citations from the OT in the NT (4.4% of the content). If clear allusions are taken into consideration, the figures are much higher. Depending upon who’s doing the counting, Abraham is mentioned 69 to 75 times in the NT, 9 times in Galatians alone. He is mentioned as part of the genealogy of the Jews and Jesus, God’s covenant with the Jewish people, and 13 times as an example of faith.

Galatians 3:6 – In the same way, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” [NLT] is a direct quote from Genesis 15:6 – And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith. This is where God first established his covenant with Abraham and is foundational in defining God’s relationship with all humanity. The covenant and the need for faith is reiterated numerous times in both the OT and NT.

Habakkuk 2:4 – “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.

Hebrews 10:38 – And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.”

7. In verses 10-12, Paul quotes three Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 27:26, Habakkuk 2:4, and Leviticus 18:5). What do these OT passages tell us about the law?

These passages tell us several things about the law. Verse 10 quotes Deut 27:26 – “Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” This summarizes the curse that people are under who try to pursue righteousness through keeping the law rather than accepting God’s offer of grace.

Verse 11 makes it clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law because it just plain cannot be done. Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 which says that a righteous person will live by his faithfulness to God.

In Verse 12, Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 – Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord. [NLT] This can be confusing, but it basically means that the law was (or should be) the way of life for

the redeemed (Deut 6:2, Romans 10:5), *not* a way of salvation for the lost.

8. In 3:13, how does Jesus solve the problem presented by attempting to live by the law? (Deuteronomy 21:23, Romans 4:9, 4:16, Acts 2:33)

In Verse 13, Paul says that Christ rescued (or redeemed) us from the curse pronounced by the law by taking the curse on himself for our wrongdoing (our sins). Jesus is essentially our representative: the law prints its curse on Jesus, as it were, so that in his death the curse of the law is exhausted and those held under its power were liberated.

He punctuates the curse by paraphrasing a sentence from Deuteronomy 21:23 which says that “you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.”

Romans 4:9 – Is this blessedness only for the circumcised (i.e, Jews), or also for the uncircumcised (i.e., Gentiles)? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.

Romans 4:16 – Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to *all* Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

Acts 2:33 – Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

This section ends where it began (vv. 2-5) with a reference to the importance of God’s bestowal of the Spirit on all those who believe the message of Christ and not for obeying the law of Moses.

9. Trying to be right with God (justified) by our own effort doesn’t work. Good intentions such as “I’ll do better next time” or “I’ll never do that again” usually end in failure. How can we break this cycle of failure?

Galatians 3:1-14 ~ Scripture Verses

Faith or Observance of the Law?

¹ You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

⁶ Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸ The 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.” ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

¹⁰ All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” 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 hung on a tree.” ¹⁴ 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.