

GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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1948

Chapter Five DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Galatians 3:1-4:31

With this chapter we come to the distinctly doctrinal portion of Galatians, which comprise chapters 3 and 4. As an aid to memory, the subdivisions in our outline will be indicated by a series of phrases uniform in structure.

Continuance in Grace Enjoins

In these first five verses of the third chapter, the apostle points out to his readers the folly of turning their backs upon the Gospel of grace, the truth of which had been so abundantly confirmed in their Christian experience.

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?" In giving head to false teachers, the Galatians had, indeed, shown the grossest stupidity. That is why the apostle wrote to them, asking, "Who hath bewitched you with his evil eye of sorcery to exchange the priceless Gospel of grace for a worthless gospel of works?" We need not enlarge upon the need for driving this pointed interrogation home to the hearts and minds of people today. Many unstable folk are fairly begging for a ride in every newfangled substitute for the Gospel that comes along. Almost every day we hear that gullible victims are being swindled out of funds by smooth-spoken crooks who induce them to invest in worthless enterprises. Put no trust in anyone who seeks to lure you away from a simple reliance upon your all-sufficient SAVIOUR. It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that subjection to works is rejection of grace. Self-righteousness is spiritually fatal. He who turns his back upon CHRIST as his one and only Mediator with GOD loses everything.

"Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." The tense of this phrase brings out the thought that CHRIST has been crucified but is now glorified. In the words, "**evidently set forth**," Paul reminds his readers that the message of the Cross was set forth in their midst so vividly and clearly that those who reject its saving truth are left without excuse. Never let it be forgotten that it was through His death on Calvary that JESUS has become our living LORD. Regardless of how many fulsome tributes of praise we bestow on CHRIST as the matchless Teacher, Leader and moral Example for men to follow, we dishonor Him if we refuse to acknowledge Him as the Son of GOD who died for sinners. The CHRIST

glorified is the CHRIST crucified. The One to be lifted up by us must be the One lifted up for us and for all who will put their trust in Him as the atoning Sacrifice: "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life**" (John 3:14, 15).

"**This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**" This query ushers in a series of questions skillfully designed, by the honest answers evoked, to build up an indisputable argument from Christian experience in support of the thesis that men are justified by faith alone. The question immediately before us in verse 2 points to the manner in which the Galatian believers had become children of GOD through the miracle of the new birth and the reception of the HOLY SPIRIT. "**If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his**" (Romans 8:9). If, then, regeneration was wrought in their hearts through the mighty work of GOD in response to their simple faith in JESUS as SAVIOUR, how can there possibly be any place for works, either alone or in addition to faith, so far as the obtaining of salvation is concerned?

"**Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?**" Sanctification, no less than regeneration, is the work of the HOLY SPIRIT, conditioned by faith on the part of the Christians. This is a further reason why all forms of legalism should be cast out root and branch. Is it reasonable, Paul asks in effect that you can by conforming to rites and ceremonies bring to fruition that which the HOLY SPIRIT alone could initiate in your souls? Merely to ask such a question is to answer it in the negative. What has been implanted by the SPIRIT must be unfolded in the SPIRIT. What He begins He will complete: "**Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**" (Philippians 1:6). The source of spiritual nativity points the course to spiritual maturity. The grace of continuance hinges on the continuance of grace. How stupid, having found regeneration by faith, to seek sanctification through works! As well might a navigator, after setting sail upon a swelling flood tide, deliberately run his ship aground and try to float it on dry land.

"**Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.**" It will minister richly to our stability and fortitude in Christian living if we get the real force of this appeal to the Galatians. In common with many other followers of CHRIST in that first century, the Galatian converts had undoubtedly been called upon to endure persecution of greater or lesser intensity in defense of their new-found faith. But, if Paul contends, addressing the Galatian Christians, this salvation could have become yours through conformity to Judaistic practices, and not by faith entirely apart from works, then you have needlessly gone through great sufferings. Again, granted that you were right and the Judaizers wrong, then, in following their counsel in substituting a gospel of works for the Gospel of grace, all the rewards you have been laying up for yourselves through your sufferings and sacrifices for the SAVIOUR: "**Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you . . . For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works**" (Matthew 5:12; 16:27) and "**And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together**" (Romans 8:17) will have been forfeited. Pertinent applications to our own experience are not far to seek. Whenever we avoid bearing the cross of ridicule, reproach and persecution for JESUS' sake through temporizing and conformity to popular forms

of works-righteousness, we neutralize our past witness and limit our future rewards. Why sell cheap what has cost us dear in the way of reproach for the name of CHRIST? Furthermore, GOD may even be using the fires of present affliction for the SAVIOUR for the forging of stronger anchors of conviction in days to come. The more we suffer for our faith, the more precious does it become to us, and the less likely shall we be, under future pressure from legalistic quarters to exchange our faith in Christ for any form of works-righteousness.

"He . . . that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" And now the apostle offers the fact of miracles wrought in their midst in response to faith as further evidence that justification must be by faith and entirely apart from works, is it conceivable that faith should have proved in their experience to be the key to birth in CHRIST, growth in grace and works for GOD? Nor must we of today ever forget that faith in works and works of faith are mutually exclusive.

Inheritance of Faith Explained (Galatians 3:6-9)

In this and the succeeding subdivisions of the material covered in our chapter, we find Paul bringing in Abraham as the classic example from Old Testament history of the great principle of justification by faith. In connection with this study of Galatians 3:6-22 read very carefully the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans where this subject is treated at greater length.

"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Read Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:1-21; cf. Genesis 15:6 with Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23. Memorize Galatians 3:6). When it is said that Abraham believed GOD, what is meant is his personal trust in GOD, his acceptance of God's Word absolutely, simply because it was His Word. This famous verse (3:6) was first recorded in the chapter which tells of God's covenant with Abraham. The patriarch believed that GOD would give him the promised son, through whom the nation should come which would give to the world the promised Redeemer. Such belief implied confidence in the faithfulness and ability of GOD to keep His promises, and so it was faith in the fullest sense. It is to be noted, however, that faith is the condition, not the ground, of acceptance with GOD.

It is simply the hand that seizes the life preserver thrown to a drowning man.

It is the channel through which flows the grace that transforms deserts into gardens.

It is reckoned as righteousness because it alone makes a man the recipient of the one and only kind of righteousness that GOD can value as such. In no other way than through faith in JESUS is it possible for the sinner to acquire the righteousness that GOD requires. Many a man is destined to be cruelly and eternally disillusioned when he appears at the judgment bar of GOD laden with the worthless stock of his own self-righteousness.

"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham . . . So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." These words of the apostle may very likely be in reply to a charge of the Judaizers that only those who were circumcised could participate in the Messianic blessings. It is far otherwise, however, Paul writes in substance, since faith puts all who believe in JESUS in the line of spiritual descent from

Abraham. And this he insists upon, despite the fact that many Jews counted upon their racial descent from Abraham in the flesh to guarantee them against all condemnation and to procure for them eternal blessings, irrespective of the kind of life they might be living. Circumcision was commonly regarded as affording immunity from penalty. In these assumptions, the Jews overlooked two basic facts, namely, that birth is not worth, and that rites do not in themselves confer rights. And we must keep ever in view that it is faith alone which saves. Forms without truth are plates without food. They are empty words without meaning and value.

It was imperative that the Galatians be brought to see that by faith alone they could enter into the spiritual inheritance of Abraham. And yet even down to our own day the fallacy of works has continued to rob multitudes of the legacy of faith. The heritage of eternal life becomes ours only as we accept CHRIST by faith. No man is made right with GOD by a man-made rite.

Read again Genesis 12:1-3, from which passage the quotation in Galatians 3:8 is taken, "**in thee shall all nations be blessed.**" In this promise that the SAVIOUR should come through the family of Abraham - Paul tells us in Galatians 3:8 - GOD "**preached . . . the gospel unto Abraham.**"

Deliverance from Wrath Procured (3:10-14)

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." In Deuteronomy 27:15-26, we have the basis for Paul's statement that to be under the works of the law is to be under the curse of the law. The law knows no mercy.

- it tolerates not the slightest deviation from its unyielding demands.
- it exacts the full penalty for every tiny transgression.
- it ever condemns and never condones.
- it confronts men like a sheer perpendicular cliff towering thousands of feet into the air, with the demand that men scale it or die in the attempt. Trapped on a ledge, as all men will be sooner or later, there is no way of deliverance save through the grace of GOD.

That no man can possibly keep the whole law is self-evident from experience and observation; moreover, it is clearly taught in Scripture. He that breaks the law at even one point is guilty of all (James 2:10). A chain, however long it may be, needs to have but one link break to be rendered useless. Even though a man live right on the border line, he is still under the laws of the state in which his house stands, "So near, and yet so far!" he might well say, if the state just across the street from his house were tax-free, while he himself was being taxed beyond all endurance. Need we make the application?

"The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them." Man might live by the law if he could perfectly keep the law; but the point is, no man ever has met, and no man ever can meet, these conditions. "**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**" (Romans 3:23); consequently, if man is to live and not die, he must find life through the grace of GOD. The only escape from the penalty of the law - referring to the illustration at the close of the preceding paragraph - is for him to step across the line into the state of grace. Once that step of faith is taken, the law has absolutely no more claim upon him

(Romans 8:1).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." CHRIST became a curse for us to remove the curse from us. GOD made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). (Memorize Galatians 3:13 and II Corinthians 5:21). It is so easy for us to repeat these words; but do we even begin to grasp their tremendous and solemnizing meaning?

CHRIST bore the full penalty of sin in our behalf.

- He paid the debt to the full penalty of sin in our behalf.
- He paid the debt to set us free.

As JESUS hung on the Cross for us, the FATHER beheld the innocent SAVIOUR through the sinner, that for all time to come He might be able to view the penitent sinner through the SAVIOUR. The wrath of GOD fell upon our adorable LORD when He became our Sin bearer, even though He was never more the object of God's love than when on the Cross He was accomplishing the very work that He came to do in fulfillment of the eternal counsel of the Triune GOD (Revelation 13:8). When JESUS cried out in those awful words, **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"** It was then that He tasted death for us and went through the very pains of hell in our behalf.

"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Two gracious purposes of the Redeemer are coupled together: (1) the extension of blessing to Gentiles as well as Jews: and (2) the outpouring of the SPIRIT upon those who embrace the faith of CHRIST. There can never be an experience of the Kingdom of CHRIST in the hearts and lives of men, apart from an endowment of the SPIRIT. The question is, Are we willing to pay the price in prayer and obedience to procure the fullness of the Spirit's power which it cost JESUS the Cross to make available for us?

Integrity of GOD Displayed (3:15-22)

In verses 15-22 of this third chapter, the apostle proceeds to show that, contrary to what at first might be thought, the promise to Abraham was by no means annulled in the giving of the law, with all the penalties attached thereto.

Promise of CHRIST (verses 15-18)

"And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." Had the inheritance been made conditional on obedience to the law given four hundred and thirty years after the covenant made with Abraham, the previous promise would have been thereby invalidated. The promise was not an undertaking based on terms of mutual agreement. GOD Himself took the initiative. It was a spontaneous offer on His part. Far from being a contract between equals, it was a free and unmerited outpouring of divine mercy. If works of the law were to play any part in justification, that would annul the Abrahamic covenant

and would make invalid God's promise concerning CHRIST. The law given later could not set at naught the promise given earlier. The integrity of GOD was at stake. It is important that we see this. The principle of the self-consistency and honor of GOD is not without a forceful bearing upon our own experiences and attitudes. We should be willing to stake everything on the conviction and assurance that GOD cannot deny Himself. All apparent contradictions are reconciled in the truth. The clouds that obscure do not destroy the summit where all the slopes of the mountain come to a peak. GOD cannot be untrue to His own nature. He is bound to keep His Word. Therefore, test GOD by Himself. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Find in CHRIST the master key to the Book. He is the answer to every question pertaining to eternity. In Him is the solution to every enigmatic "X" in the universe (Colossians 1:17; 2:3).

We must never for a moment lose sight of the fact that we become heirs of promise only as we yield our hearts to JESUS and thus enter into vital union with the One in and through whom the promise is fulfilled.

Purpose of law (verses 19-22)

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." This verse marks the law as supplementary and hence subordinate to the promise. Weymouth tells us that the law was "imposed later on for the sake of defining sin." The law magnified Israel's sin and pressed upon them the need of a SAVIOUR. The law was given to reveal sin, not to remove it. As someone has put it, the mirror which shows one that his face is dirty does not wash it for him.

"But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." In a day when there is much foggy thinking on the relation between law and grace, we need to understand clearly that the law and the promise are not in conflict because they have entirely different functions to fulfill. Sin necessitated the law; grace precipitated the Cross.

The law was a supplement to, not a contradiction of, the covenant.

- the law revealed the need, and the Cross produced the way, of salvation.
- the law was a plowing for the seed, not a planting of the seed.

Conviction of sin by the law is a far different thing from the production of life through the CHRIST in whom alone we can be made children of GOD and heirs of the promise.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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