

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

January 27, 2020

Series – The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

Series - *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*

Paul's Earnestness for Grace

Text – Galatians 3:1 - 14

Introduction

The Letter to the Galatians is very important because it establishes clearly and concisely that salvation is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ plus nothing:

Salvation is from the penalty of our sins, which ultimately leads to eternal death in Hell. Salvation also brings us through a personal relationship on this earth with the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately to an eternal destination of Heaven.

Settling the questions of where we go when we die, and how to get there, are really the most important questions that we can answer in this life; and they have to be answered in this life – you cannot wait until you die to find the answers to these questions.

Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia answers these questions.

The Letter to the Galatians demonstrates that the Christian is saved by the grace of God, and also teaches that the Christian life is lived by the grace of God:

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11)

We saw in chapter one where Paul introduced the letter to the believers in Galatia by giving them an extremely strong warning – don't mess with the gospel of grace! The strength of this warning was magnified even more due the fact that it was repeated twice:

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

(Galatians 1:6-9)

In chapter two we learned that there was some contention between Peter and Paul surrounding the doctrine of grace; but we also saw that out of the contention came Paul's creed on the subject of grace:

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Galatians 2:16)

Transition

In this first half of chapter three, we see Paul's zeal, passion, earnestness in defense of the grace against the attack of legalism. We said that his was the strongest and most stern of all of Paul's letters. Paul is as serious about this subject as he can get. And, nowhere in the epistle is that more evident than in this third chapter.

I. A Strong Castigation (a severe reprimand - vs. 1 – 5)

Notice in verse 1 the phrase, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." What Paul meant by this was that the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which taken together are at the very core of what we, as Christians, believe; the very foundation of our faith. This truth was declared perfectly unto these people of Galatia. They saw a vivid picture of both the crucified and the risen Lord. Paul is saying that if salvation comes through the Law, then why did Christ have to die, and then revive.

Notice the language Paul uses in v. 1 and v. 3. Paul is using very tough love here. He is very upset, and very concerned about the spiritual condition of the believers in Galatia. They were reverting back from faith to a works based religion of rules and rituals.

Verse 2 – "This only would I learn of you" – In today's language, we would say: "Tell me one thing."

Paul's continued argument in verse 2 is basically this: You have definitely received the Holy Spirit of God, which indicates a genuine salvation. Did you receive the Spirit of God by keeping the Law, or did you receive it through faith in Jesus Christ? If you received the Spirit by faith, then why would you revert back to the Law.

Notice in v. 3 – Paul answers his own question, and introduces another. You were saved by faith, but do you need the Law to make you complete or perfect. If the Law could not save you, how can it complete you. Faith in Christ will complete you:

"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)

By reverting back to the Law, they were no longer moving forward in faith, but moving backwards in the flesh.

In v. 4 Paul states that if keeping the Law was right, then everything that they had suffered because of their faith was in vain (for nothing).

In v. 5 Paul explains that the miracles that were performed in their presence were done through faith, and not through the Law.

"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ... And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." (Acts 14:3, 8-11)

Not to mention the fact that Paul, himself, was stoned and left for dead outside the city of Lystra, but then got back up and re-entered the city.

All of this was done by faith; not through the works of the flesh.

Timothy George in his commentary on Galatians restated the sentiments of Paul:

"See where this kind of theology will lead you! If salvation is not the work of God from first to last, then the preaching of the gospel is vanity, the cross of Christ was a farce, and the gift of the Holy Spirit means nothing!"¹

II. A Scriptural Illustration (vs. 6 – 9)

Paul now moves from the discussion involving the experience of the Galatians to an illustration from the Old Testament Scripture. Abraham was saved by faith before there ever was a law.

"And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

Paul will full develop the illustration of Abraham in his letter to the Romans.

¹ George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 214). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Read Romans 3:21 through all of chapter 4.

III. A Senseless Continuation (vs. 10 – 14)

It makes absolutely no sense to continue in the Law, when the Law demanded perfection, and nobody is perfect. If you and I are going to live according to the Law, then we have to do it perfectly, which is an evident impossibility.

Jesus Christ was the only one who could fulfill the Law perfectly, and He died on the Cross so that we wouldn't have to even try. The Law could only bring condemnation, but Christ offers salvation to all who will put their faith in Him.

Conclusion

Verse 11 sums it all up very nicely. The “just” – those that are justified – are justified by faith and not by keeping the Law. Not only were they saved by faith, they were also to live by faith.

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11 KJV)

Interestingly, the phrase “the just shall live by faith”, though found many times in the New Testament, did not begin in the New Testament. We first see in the Old Testament Minor Prophet Book of Habakkuk, in chapter two and verse four.

According to a 3rd century rabbi, Moses gave 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. David reduced them to 11 in Psalm 15. Isaiah made them 6 (Isaiah 33:14, 15). Micah 6:8 binds them into 3 commands:

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8)

Habbakuk reduces them all to one great statement: The just shall live by faith.

And Jesus said we should love God – that's salvation by faith – that's relationship.

And then he said we should love people – that's living by faith.

Law vs. Grace Illustration

Some years ago, I had a little school for young Indian men and women, who came to my home in Oakland, California, from the various tribes in northern Arizona. One of these was a Navajo young man of unusually keen intelligence. One Sunday evening, he went with me to our young people's meeting. They were talking about the epistle to the Galatians, and the special subject was law and grace. They were not very clear

about it, and finally one turned to the Indian and said, "I wonder whether our Indian friend has anything to say about this."

He rose to his feet and said, "Well, my friends, I have been listening very carefully, because I am here to learn all I can in order to take it back to my people. I do not understand all that you are talking about, and I do not think you do yourselves. But concerning this law and grace business, let me see if I can make it clear. I think it is like this. When Mr. Ironside brought me from my home we took the longest railroad journey I ever took. We got out at Barstow, and there I saw the most beautiful railroad station and hotel I have ever seen. I walked all around and saw at one end a sign, 'Do not spit here.' I looked at that sign and then looked down at the ground and saw many had spitted there, and before I think what I am doing I have spitted myself. Isn't that strange when the sign say, 'Do not spit here'?"

"I come to Oakland and go to the home of the lady who invited me to dinner today and I am in the nicest home I have been in. Such beautiful furniture and carpets, I hate to step on them. I sank into a comfortable chair, and the lady said, 'Now, John, you sit there while I go out and see whether the maid has dinner ready.' I look around at the beautiful pictures, at the grand piano, and I walk all around those rooms. I am looking for a sign; and the sign I am looking for is, 'Do not spit here,' but I look around those two beautiful drawing rooms, and cannot find a sign like this. I think 'What a pity when this is such a beautiful home to have people spitting all over it -- too bad they don't put up a sign!' So I look all over that carpet, but cannot find that anybody have spitted there. What a queer thing! Where the sign says, 'Do not spit,' a lot of people spitted. Where there was no sign at all, in that beautiful home, nobody spitted. Now I understand! That sign is law, but inside the home it is grace. They love their beautiful home, and they want to keep it clean. They do not need a sign to tell them so. I think that explains the law and grace business."

As he sat down, a murmur of approval went round the room and the leader exclaimed, "I think that is the best illustration of law and grace I have ever heard."²

² H. A. Ironside, Illustrations of Bible Truth, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 40-42.