

The Promise of the Gospel

Lesson Scope: Galatians 3

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

In the first two chapters of Galatians, Paul presented a defence of his apostleship, the unity of divine inspiration, and the efficacy of the Gospel message that he preached. This was necessary due to the teaching of the Judaizers, who preached a perverted message. In doing so, Paul provides a framework that enables the seeker to discern whether a message is genuine or perverted.

Having established the fact that only faith in Christ brings justification, and that the Law can only detract from Christ's work, he now moves to the doctrinal core of his argument, contained in chapters three and four. How do the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Law, and faith in Christ relate? Paul expresses consternation because the Galatians do not understand.

Weighty questions can be unlocked with simple questions, and Paul starts with the central one—"Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Faith is the key to justification with God.

The Gospel was foretold in God's promise to Abraham that "in thee shall all nations be blessed." Abraham's faith is a pattern for those who would receive the promised blessings.

Many were the faithful in Old Testament times who appreciated and greatly benefited from the Law. The Law convinced man of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, but man failed to live up to the Law's demands. Be careful not to minimize the Law in your effort to emphasize the need for faith. The Law fulfilled the purposes God had planned for it, until a new and better way was introduced through the Gospel.

Reasoning, illustration, allegory, and reprimand are all means to gain our attention and arrest the progress of error. Paul uses each method in his writing to the Galatians. May we grow spiritually in every form of appeal.

Lesson Aim: To see truths related to Jews and Gentiles alike becoming “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

Theme Verses: Romans 8:1-2. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Lesson Text

The Gospel Foretold to Abraham

Galatians 3:1-3

¹ (KJV) O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ² This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Galatians 3:9-18

⁹ (KJV) So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is* evident: for, The just shall live by faith. ¹² And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. ¹³ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: ¹⁴ That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. ¹⁵ Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man's covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

The Law Added for a Time

Galatians 3:19-24

¹⁹ (KJV) Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. ²⁰ Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one, but God is one. ²¹ *Is* the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. ²² But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. ²⁴ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The Believers Accepted as Mature Sons

Galatians 3:25-28

²⁵ (KJV) But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. ²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Questions for Study

The Gospel Foretold to Abraham

1. What can be gleaned from the challenge and probing questions that Paul addresses to the Galatians?
2. What major themes of Abraham's relationship with God remain relevant in the New Dispensation?
3. What was the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law?
4. From these verses, discuss the remedy that Christ provided for sin.

The Law Added for a Time

5. Enumerate the purposes the Law served and the resulting benefits.
6. What should be our guide for conduct, since we are no longer under the disciplines of the Law?

The Believers Accepted as Mature Sons

7. How do we become Abraham's seed?
8. What are the traits of and relationships in this divine family?

Analysing the Passage

Paul's passionate question in 3:1 indicates both the degree to which the Galatians had embraced the message of the Judaizers and the urgency of Paul's efforts to correct their error. He shifts from statements to a series of rhetorical questions; the answers being obvious, the conclusion should likewise be clear. Having begun through the hearing of faith and the quickening of the Spirit, no man can grow spiritually by reverting to the Law. To conclusively clinch this point, Paul goes back to Abraham, who preceded the Mosaic Law. Abraham believed God—an exercise of faith. God thereby accounted Abraham righteous. This is the unchanging way that God grants acceptance to any man, which Paul highlights by quoting a post-Mosaic-Law Scripture in Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by his faith."

The Law is not of faith, and could never justify anyone; its benefit came through the doing and obeying of it (3: 12). The curse of the Law became evident to those who attempted to do so completely; they were unable to reach its standard and were therefore under its curse (3:10).

Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham, the fulfillment of the ancient promise (3:16). The Law did not replace or nullify this promise. Thus the primary purpose of the Law is revealed—to show that all have sinned and that all qualify for the promise of faith in Jesus Christ (3:22). Without the Law, sinful man had no benchmark by which he might comprehend his sinful state and the gap between him and the holy God. Without that awareness, fallen man has no motivation to act in faith and receive justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Law served its purpose in revealing sin and bringing us to Christ. Now all who have put on Christ join the united family of God. In this family, none of the divisions and prejudices that mar human relationships are justified.

Principles and Applications

The Gospel Foretold to Abraham

1. Just as believers receive the Holy Spirit through faith, so they must pursue perfection by faith (3:1-3). We must be sure that our teaching on Christian growth and victory never becomes human-effort oriented. Faith (which biblically means more than mere mental assent) includes obedience and surrender. But it never operates on "I must try a little

harder” or “I must deny myself of this yet” or “I must be a little more strict or conservative.”

2. God’s covenant with Abraham demonstrated the universality of faith as the condition for receiving justification (3: 6-9). When a man believes God, his debt is graciously cancelled and a right standing before God is entered in his account. All who believe God are granted this justification and become the children of Abraham (3:7). It is impossible for the conduct of sinful man to become meritorious enough to pay his sin debt.

3. The Law, which “is not of faith,” can never provide justification (3:11-12). Even under the Law, as Habakkuk declared, the person who was just was the person who lived by faith. The Law demanded compliance, which man, apart from the new birth and the Holy Spirit’s power, could not render. So, instead of justification, the Old Testament saint needed to continually offer sacrifices for his atonement.

4. Christ ’s substitutionary work as the sin bearer opens the way for Jew and Gentile alike to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (3:13-14). Through His death on the cross, Christ was made a curse for us so that even the Gentiles can receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Praise His name for His willingness to provide redemption for whosoever will!

5. The Law cannot “make the promise of none effect” (3:16-18). The Law was never intended as an alternate means of justification. It was given to lead men to see their need of the promise by showing them the, sinfulness of sin. The inheritance, something that by definition cannot be earned, is by promise.

The Law Added for a Time

6. The Law, a temporary institution, lacked life-giving, justifying power (3:19, 21). By revealing sin, the Law enlightened the conscience and became a restraint to the shameless commission of sin. But no law, however high its ethics, can impart life. The Law works condemnation and death.

7. The Law points to Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate answer to man’s sin problem (3:22-24). God has greater intentions than the mere reduction of sins committed. Rather, He intends that all mankind be victorious over sin—that sin is stopped entirely and its destructive consequences be healed. The Law reveals our universal need of a remedy for sin.

Christ on the cross provided that universal remedy. The Law did not disannul the promise to Abraham; rather, it revealed to many more the reason for and the Good News contained in the ancient promise he received.

The Believers Accepted as Mature Sons

8. The New Testament provides deliverance from the disciplines of the Law and freedom as mature “children of God” (3:25-26). The numerous demands of the Law were burdensome to an unregenerate people (Acts 15:10). The purpose of the Law was preparatory, but Calvary marked the completion of that work.

9. Identity with Christ unifies all believers as “heirs according to the promise” (3:27-29). In Christ, God’s family includes every race. All who put on Christ are accepted. Those who believe as Abraham did are thereby his children. God deals with the children of Abraham as He did with Abraham himself. What a privilege!

Important Teachings

1. Just as believers receive the Holy Spirit through faith, so they must pursue perfection by faith (3:1-3).

2. God’s covenant with Abraham demonstrated the universality of faith as the condition for receiving justification (3:6-9).

3. The Law, which “is not of faith,” can never provide justification (3:11-12).

4. Christ’s substitutionary work as the sin bearer opens the way for Jew and Gentile alike to “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (3:13-14).

5. The Law cannot “make the promise of none effect” (3:16-18).

6. The Law, a temporary institution, lacked life-giving, justifying power (3:19, 21).

7. The Law points to Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate answer to man’s sin problem (3:22-24).

8. The New Testament provides deliverance from the disciplines of the Law and freedom as mature “children of God” (3:25-26).

9. Identity with Christ unifies all believers as “heirs according to the promise” (3:27-29).

Answers to Questions

1. What can be gleaned from the challenge and probing questions that Paul addresses to the Galatians?

The matter under consideration was urgent, with the salvation of souls at stake. We marvel at the intensity, and perhaps it is worth considering how we would respond to such a rebuke. Resentment, disdain, or sensitivity are predictable responses, but the lifesaving response is acceptance, acknowledgement, and repentance.

2. What major themes of Abraham's relationship with God remain relevant in the New Dispensation?

Our depraved and sinful nature created the debt; our actions intensified and deepened it. We can never rise far enough above our depravity to pay our debt. We are justified (made sinless) by active belief in God. God responds in grace by adding righteousness to our account and paying that debt.

3. What was the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law?

The promise to Abraham was that in his seed, the entire human family would be blessed. The Mosaic Law helps us comprehend that the entire human family is lost. The Law revealed the root cause for universal death, but it could not provide an escape from death. So the Mosaic Law complemented the promise to Abraham. When the promise was fulfilled in Christ, the Law was fulfilled, its principles clarified, and the standards of behaviour raised. The work of Christ did not contradict the Law; the Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Law came from the same mind—the mind of God.

4. From these verses, discuss the remedy that Christ provided for sin.

He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by bearing the curse of the cross (3:13). His mediatory work is available to all who believe (3:22). Because He was of the human race, His offering applies to all. The verses in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 say it more clearly, but the thought is also in this chapter.

5. Enumerate the purposes the Law served and the resulting benefits.

It served as a restraint on the sinful tendencies of man. While it could not bring spiritual life, sins that are uncommitted require no punishment. The quality of life where fewer sins are committed is higher than where sin is rampant. The rites and ceremonies of the Law provided a

way to cover the sin problem temporarily while the Law was in effect; it was efficacious to grant the Old Testament saints a solution to the sin problem.

6. What should be our guide for conduct, since we are no longer under the disciplines of the Law?

We have the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide us as well as a Scriptural church discipline. The wisdom of our brethren and sisters, who also are part of the family of God, can help to guide us in the way of truth.

7. How do we become Abraham's seed?

We become Abraham's seed as we by faith identify with Christ Jesus. Those who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ. They assume His nature and attributes. The transcendent rite of baptism brings us into fellowship with God and into membership with the community of believers. Baptism does not save us, but it indicates our obedience to God and submission to His body.

8. What are the traits of and relationships in this divine family?

All human barriers are removed, social hierarchies are levelled. We are unified with one another and with Christ. We enter the lineage of Abraham, heirs of the promise. We become instruments of God in extending blessing in the world.

Summarizing the Lesson

Beginning with Abraham (Genesis 12), God established the concept of separation, and divided humanity into two families. He promised Abraham that through his biological seed all nations would be blessed.

Through the Mosaic Law, God enabled man to see the awful gap between fallen man and a holy God. Far from replacing or annulling that promise, the Mosaic Law rather complemented it and preserved humanity until the time was ripe for the fulfillment of the promise.

Research Guide

1. Read Romans 5:14-21, where Paul more directly deals with the symmetry of loss and redemption. Of special relevance to this lesson are the parenthetical verses 13-17. Here Paul makes clear that the generations living between Adam and Moses sinned—which is evident because they died! This reveals that the Law does not “make” a person

sinful, because their sin was not a violation of a direct command as was the sin of our first parents.