

FPFWC Christian Development



Faith Triumphs, Law Falls

October 2023

Fall Quarter

October 21, 2023

Lesson #3 – Spirit and Flesh

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Galatians 3:1-14

ICE BREAKERS-

1. What makes living by the law seem easier or better than living by the Spirit?
2. Why is Jesus' crucifixion a good summary of the gospel?

Key Verse: “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—Galatians 3:2b

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Paul's letter to the Galatians arose from a real-life crisis. He was confronting a menace to the churches he had planted in the province of Galatia. This danger was the false teaching that it was necessary to keep the Jewish law to be saved. Paul's argument against this heresy necessarily involved exposition of Scripture. The effect of Paul's masterful and inspired use of Old Testament passages demonstrated that the gospel was not a radical departure from the Old Testament. Properly understood, the Old Testament also teaches a relationship to God based on faith rather than works. We must keep in mind that the Jews in Paul's time had a very different understanding of the word law than we do. We tend to think of law as including civil rules and regulations—prescriptions that govern our conduct. While there was an element of that within Old Testament laws, that system was primarily meant to maintain a right relationship with God. To the Jews, these laws consisted of not only regulations concerning relationships but also ceremonial regulations covering such matters as worship and diet. Moral and ethical living was only a part of what the Jews thought of when they used the word law.

LESSON COMMENTARY

3:1. Showing deep concern for the Galatians, Paul rebuked them sharply (cf. 1Co 3:1). His words (foolish, v. 3; 1Tm 6:9; bewitched, only here in the NT) imply they were in danger of seriously misunderstanding the gospel. They needed to see Christ crucified again, for if righteousness were through obedience to the law, then He was crucified “needlessly” (2:21). 3:2–5. Paul next asked a series of rhetorical questions that drive at one (only) all-important thing: the Holy Spirit. He is a promised blessing of the new covenant (Ezk 36:27; Jl 3:1; cf. Jr 31:31–34) and is not received by obedience to Law but only by hearing the gospel and believing (faith; cf. 3:14). Paul said earlier that faith and law are mutually exclusive (2:15–16). Parallel to those two, Spirit and flesh (divine empowerment vs. mere human strength or effort) are likewise mutually exclusive. Since law and

flesh are powerless (Rm 7:5; 8:3), attempting to grow in spiritual maturity (be perfected) by them is fruitless (vain). The Galatians' situation was dangerous, but with the words if indeed (v. 4), Paul held out the possibility that the Galatians' suffering would not be in vain. B. Faith and Children of Abraham (3:6–9) The link with 3:1–5 is the question, "How does one receive God's blessing?" By faith the Galatians received the Spirit (3:2b), a promised blessing of the OT. Likewise, and more important, Abraham received blessing—that is, righteousness—by faith. Probably Paul's legalistic opponents claimed that the blessing of being in Abraham's family comes by way of law. For Paul, on the other hand, those characterized by trust (those who are of faith) are Abraham's children. To demonstrate that blessing comes by faith, not by works, Paul went to Gn 15:6. It is the first passage in the OT that links faith and righteousness. Furthermore, in Gn 12:1–3 God promised blessing to all ... nations through Abraham's family. Since being blessed like this is available to all (even Gentiles), it cannot come by the Mosaic law, for that had been given to Israel, not the Gentiles. Blessing comes to those who trust God, as Abraham did, not to those who rely on works. C. Law, Works, Curse, and Christ (3:10–14) This section helps explain why blessing is not by works. Paul cited key verses of the OT that he treated as basic principles of operation. The point is that, in contrast to the blessing that came to believing Abraham, the law does not yield blessing but a curse (cf. Dt 30:15–20; 2Co 3:7–9). The logic of vv. 10–14 runs this way: 1. The blessing of the Law is promised to those who obey it (v. 12, quoting Lv 18:5). 2. What Paul left unstated is that the blessing is never actually received. Instead, those who rely on works are not able to do all that is written in the law (cf. Rm 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 6:14). 3. Thus, all who rely on law are cursed (v. 10, quoting Dt 27:26). 4. The truth of statement 3 above is confirmed. Since Hab 2:4 says that blessing comes by faith (cf. Rm 1:16–17), it cannot come by obedience to law. 5. Through his crucifixion, Christ redeemed (exagorazo refers to buying someone or something out of a dangerous position; cf. 4:5) believers from the penalty of the Law (the curse; v. 13 quoting Dt 21:23). 6. Thus the blessing that was promised to Abraham—including the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:2)—comes to all those who have faith, even Gentiles (v. 14).

LESSON NUGGET - It does us good to examine ourselves to make sure our spiritual experience is valid (2 Corinthians 13:5). Do you have the Spirit living within? (See Romans 8:9) If you began in the Spirit (which is the only way to begin), are you trying to continue in the power of the flesh? Like Abraham, were you saved by faith; and are you now, like Abraham, walking by faith?

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary