

TRUE LIFE Galatians 3:1-14

Up until this point in Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia he had addressed the question of his authority as a true apostle of Christ and had refuted the arguments of those who were advocating that Gentiles needed to adopt the Jewish traditions and practices in addition to their faith in Christ in order to be saved. Beginning in chapter three and continuing through chapter four Paul presented a series of arguments which convincingly shows the soundness and truth of the gospel message that he had been preaching. These arguments also show the speciousness of trying to add anything to the work of the cross as a requirement for salvation.

These arguments involved the initial salvation experience of those in the Galatian churches, arguments from the Old Testament regarding the experience of Abraham, the effects of the Law and the work of Christ. Paul went on to show the permanence of faith or the fact that the Law cannot change the promise of God. It was important to point out the purpose of the Law while emphasizing that the Law was not greater than nor contrary to God's promise.

Paul's argument continued with regard to the believer's present position and showed that the Law cannot do what the promise would accomplish. He began chapter four with an illustration of "a child becoming an heir" to help the churches of Galatia understand the impact of what God had done in His plan of salvation.

The Spirit Confirms It – 3:1-5

¹ You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ² This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Galatians 3:1–5 (NASB95)

Paul saw the condition among the Galatian churches as one in which these new Christians were being "charmed" (or hypnotized) into believing that strict adherence to the ritualistic laws was necessary to be in right relationship to God. Apparently, they did not see a disconnect with the message of the Judaizers and their own salvation experience. Paul had clearly presented the truth to them that focused on "Christ crucified" as the solution to the alienation of the human race from God the Creator. There was no remedial procedure that could fix the fatal spiritual illness with which they were born. They came into a proper relationship with God by faith in the atoning death of Jesus. If their fatal condition could have been fixed without a transplant (replacing their old life with the new life of Christ), then it would have been for no purpose that Jesus died.

Paul's pointed question regarding their receiving the Holy Spirit by faith or by the works of the Law was a rhetorical one in that there was only one answer – it had to be by faith since they knew nothing of the Law at that time. Their pre-Christian life was pagan and there was only a limited exposure to Judaism in the area in which they lived. Consequently, they did not know enough about the Law to have been influenced by it when they first encountered the true gospel message and believed.

Why did Paul use the phrase "you received the Holy Spirit" rather than "you were saved" in this question of their experience of several years before? It could be that he wanted to be specific and avoid any ambiguity that might be associated with the term "saved." What are the implications of having received the Holy Spirit that might not be as obvious if the word "saved" was used? One of the first ideas might be the reality of the new (spiritual) birth that we

experience when we put our faith in the completed work of Christ on the Cross. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives should cause us to think about His ministry in us, He leads us, teaches us, empowers us, comforts us and we find joy in knowing that we are the Temple of God. Another possible reason Paul used that statement could have been that the same manifestation of the Spirit happened when they believed as had occurred with Cornelius and his family.

Having a new life source within us is great. However, what are we going to do with that new life source and the new life it produces? It seems logical that we would build a whole new lifestyle that is appropriate with and in harmony with the Spiritual life source within us and not attempt to accomplish this growth and maturity by keeping rules and regulations which was the old ways of doing things. You would think that a transformation would take place in which we would learn to do things differently and to even think in different terms. We would interpret events around us in a different light. (This is what Paul meant in Romans 12:2 when he wrote, “but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”)

Paul was amazed at the actions of the Christians in Galatia in that it appeared they were now trying to build their new life around the limitations of the old “life-support system” of the law. It was as if they did not realize that they had a spiritual life now and that they had entered the realm of the supernatural in which God is their Father Who is at work in us to transform them into the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul called on them to consider everything that had happened to them since they believed. There had been persecution and resistance and opposition from the pagan culture from which they came and God had used these things to make them stronger in their faith and to be more like Christ. They were now being pressured by the Judaizers to not simply rely on the grace of God but to add to that their own efforts which would amount to negating the value of the completed work of Christ on the Cross and negating the value of all that God had accomplished in their lives as they suffered for the cause of Christ.

Paul’s question regarding the possibility of what they had suffered was in vain is one that we should ask ourselves about everything (pleasant or unpleasant) we experience in our lives. What would cause the events we experience to be categorized as being “in vain?” The simplest answer might be that we did not learn anything from what happened. Sometimes we aren’t even sure of “what happened” and even more likely we don’t have a clue as to why it happened. Just being aware of and acknowledging that something did happen and then determining “why” are good first steps to being able to learn from what is going on around us or what is happening to us.

In the culture of today, we see evidence that a lot of learning opportunities are happening to people “in vain” or that no benefit is gained from what happened. Even if they are aware that something happened, they don’t learn from it and they don’t become wiser or grow emotionally or spiritually from their life experiences. From a Scriptural viewpoint we could appeal to the meaning of Romans 8:28 – “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, even those who are called according to His purpose.”

If we are not taking advantage of what God is doing for our good by being engaged in the work He is doing in us, then we will probably miss the point of “all thing” and our personal convictions and true beliefs will wind up being formed by what someone else has told us rather than from learning what God is teaching us through all the disciplines of life that He allows to come our way. When that happens, the disciplines we experience leave us undisciplined and they would have been in vain.

The last point in this appeal to their own personal experience was to remind them of the

miracles that were done in their area that helped them to believe the gospel message. The one miracle of which we are aware was the healing of the man lame from birth and perhaps a second one that Paul had in mind was his being restored after a mob had stoned him and left him for dead. Those miracles had nothing to do with the works of the Law but were clearly faith related.

As previously mentioned in the comments related to Chapter two, the New Bible Commentary observed: “Paul is beginning to group a variety of terms that constitute two distinct, and even contradictory, systems. To the one belong works of the law, flesh, slavery, sin, death; to the other, faith, Spirit, inheritance and promise, freedom and sonship, righteousness and life. The first group characterizes the present evil world; the second reflects the coming of the new age, Jerusalem above.”

Abraham Believed It – 3:6-9

⁶ Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. Galatians 3:6-9 (NASB95)

In verse 16 of Chapter 2 Paul made the first use of the word “justified” which literally means “to be declared righteous.” This is exactly what happened in the case of Abraham when he simply believed God. Notice that this does not say that Abraham believed in God. This was an act of faith (believing) on the part of Abraham. His righteousness (right relationship with God) resulted from faith and Abraham’s subsequent actions also resulted from his belief (trust in) God and what God had promised him.

What did God promise Abraham? All the nations would be blessed in him. What this meant was simply that God would justify the Gentiles (nations) when they exercised the same kind of faith as Abraham exercised when he put his trust in Jehovah. This is the “good news” or the gospel that was given more than 400 years before the law was given. The true “children of Abraham” are not the Jews by physical descent, but Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Jesus Christ. All those who are “of faith” (believers) are blessed along with “believing Abraham.”

The introduction of the Law at the time of the formation of the nation of Israel did not alter God’s promise to Abraham and did not change the conditions of how a person is deemed to be justified or righteous before God.

The Curse Demands It – 3:10-14

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.” ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”— ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:10–14 (NASB95)

Anyone who would advocate obedience to the Law as a means of salvation does not understand the purpose of the Law (verses 19-25) and what the Law does. Briefly looking ahead to verses 19-25, we see that the Law was a “protector” in that it defined limits and it was a “tutor” to lead us to Christ so that we could be justified by faith. In verses ten through twelve we see that the effects of the Law were never intended as a means of salvation in that it recognized that no one could keep all the provisions of the Law and then prescribed the penalty for all who did not perform all the provisions of the Law.

Notice that simply believing in or agreeing with the precepts of the Law was not enough. The requirements were “performance” or doing all the works of the Law. The quote from Leviticus that Paul mentioned in verse twelve used the word “practices” as the requirement for obtaining “life” under the provisions of the Law. This is clearly a “no win situation” since all have sinned and justice calls for the death of the sinner. This curse of the Law was removed by God Himself in the Person of His only begotten Son who became a curse for us in His death on the Cross. The only way that we can benefit from what He did for us is to believe and accept that provision by faith. This is the meaning of the statement from Habakkuk that “the righteous man shall live by faith.”

We are saved apart from the law in the same way that Abraham was saved and that is by simply trusting God. We have a better understanding of all that God has done for us in Christ and as we exercise that trust, He transforms us by His Spirit working in us to produce the behaviors that are like the works Jesus did while He was on earth. Following the leading of the Holy Spirit produces a consistency in our walk and we find that we are really blessed as we grow to be more and more like Christ.