

Commentary on Galatians 3:1-14

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, February 12, 2012

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, February 12, 2012**, is from **Galatians 3:1-14**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse **[International Bible Lesson Commentary](#)** below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the **[Bible Lesson Forum](#)**, will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **[International Bible Lessons Commentary Index](#)**. The weekly **[International Bible Lesson](#)** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **[The Oklahoman](#)** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Galatians 3:1-14

(Galatians 3:1) You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!

Paul told the Galatians how foolish it is to turn away from faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. By adding back to their way of life the ceremonies of Judaism and the traditions of the Jews and rabbis to their belief in Jesus Christ as the way to be right with God, they had turned away from trusting in Christ alone for salvation and had turned to a different system of religion (which was faith in Jesus Christ plus ceremonies in order to be right with God). Paul thoroughly explained the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to them, and in some way demonstrated what that meant in his own life of suffering for Christ. Since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is so crucial to maintaining a true Christian faith, the meaning of Christ's death must always be taught as a condition that God fulfilled in order to be both just and merciful when forgiving the sins of those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

(Galatians 3:2) The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

The Jews never received the Holy Spirit into their lives by performing ceremonies; such as, circumcision. They had received the Holy Spirit into their lives by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the truth's Paul had taught them about Christ. Paul expects them to answer that they had received the Holy Spirit by accepting the truth of the gospel that he had preached.

(Galatians 3:3) Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

It is foolish to turn from the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit as the way to live in order to turn back to rules and regulations that concern the flesh or the human body; such as, circumcision and eating special foods and avoiding other foods. These actions that affect the body do nothing to help a person live right for God. Of course, maintaining a good healthy lifestyle is important to being physically and mentally fit to serve God and others on Earth, but physical fitness will not save us spiritually or prepare us to spend eternity with God.

(Galatians 3:4) Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing.

If we turn from Christ alone as the way to God, and if we turn from the Holy Spirit as our Leader in this life as He interprets the Bible truly for us, then our previous Christian experience can count for nothing — perhaps for now and all eternity. Their experience may not be for nothing if they return to faith in Christ alone as the way to be justified or made right with God. Only the Son of God can make us right with God and lead us into life eternal.

(Galatians 3:5) Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Paul asks about the Source of our spiritual life and how we have a relationship with this Source, the Holy Spirit, in such a way that the Holy Spirit makes a difference in the way we live. The answer is by believing the truth of the gospel and trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; it is not by performing ceremonies that may make us appear to be religious. God works miracles in response to our believing prayers; not in response to our eating special foods or attending special feast days or performing specified ceremonies.

(Galatians 3:6) Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,”

Abraham believed the promise that he would have a son and through this son have more descendents than he could count. He trusted God and His word. He trusted God, that God would do what he said. So, God counted Abraham’s believing God as righteousness (the right way to live). Abraham trusted God on many occasions; such as, leaving his home for the land God had promised him, and taking Isaac up the mountain believing that God would provide the lamb for the sacrifice.

(Galatians 3:7) so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.

If we believe God and trust in the work of Abraham's offspring, Jesus the Messiah, who lived, died, and rose from the dead for us, then we become Abraham's descendents. God counts us righteous, because we believe God as Abraham did. Note: Believing that God exists is not the same as "believing God." When we believe God, we trust and act on the basis of what God does and says, especially as we learn about the true God from our prayerful study of the Bible.

(Galatians 3:8) And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you."

God always intended to bless the Israelites and those who were not Israelites; remember how God blessed the Israelites and the Egyptians through the Israelite, Joseph in a time of famine. In times of spiritual famine, when the true God is not known, God intends to bless all people through faith in Jesus Christ. All Gentiles who believe God and place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for salvation will be counted as righteous in the eyes of God, as living the way God intends for all believers to live. The gospel that God declared to Abraham was, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in [your descendant, Jesus the Messiah]."

(Galatians 3:9) For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

Abraham was blessed by God in many ways; through Isaac and his descendents, through God's provisions for him in time of need, by God protecting him, and in many ways the Bible did not have room to describe. Just as God blessed Abraham as he believed, so those who believe as God has revealed himself through His only Son Jesus Christ in the Bible will receive more blessings than people can count.

(Galatians 3:10) For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."

If we trust in our own obedience of God's law (and the ceremonies God's law required of the Israelites before the coming of Jesus Christ) as the way to be saved from sin and inherit eternal life, we will fail because we have not obeyed in the past and will not obey the law of God perfectly in the future. The law will always point out that we have disobeyed God, deserve His judgment, and need God to save us from our sins and punishment through Jesus Christ and faith in Him as the way of salvation (the Way, the Truth, and the Life).

(Galatians 3:11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

In order to be justified by the law, a person must perfectly obey the law, though some may try to be justified by the law by attempting to justify or give an excuse for every sin; such as, “I could not help but,” “Nobody is perfect,” or “The devil made me do it.” No excuse for disobeying God will justify anyone. Only by our choosing to live by faith in God, believing God and trusting God, can we be righteous or live rightly. Future obedience to the law can never cancel out the punishment we deserve for our past sins. Only by believing in Jesus Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit through faith, can anyone obey God as the Spirit leads us according to the Bible’s teaching.

(Galatians 3:12) But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.”

Some will try to live right with God on the basis of performing prescribed religious rituals and rules; such as, worshiping God on special days, eating special foods, and observing certain feasts. Such people are not living by believing God and trusting in Jesus Christ and the good news of His work on the cross and in believers through His Spirit. Instead, they are living on the basis of and trusting in what they do, depending on their religious performances to save them, and trusting in their works of goodness as the way to merit God’s forgiveness.

(Galatians 3:13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—

The law points out the fact that we have committed sins. No return to obedience alone can save us from the consequences of our having sinned in the past. We deserve God’s just judgment for what we have done in the past. Therefore, God sent His Son to save us. Jesus Christ died a sacrificial death on the cross in our place, so God could forgive us in mercy, stress the importance of obeying His moral law [of loving God and others as Jesus loved], uphold His just government over all people, and remain just in all of His judgments. If we believe God, we will trust in what He has done for us in Jesus Christ to save us. To be saved, we will not trust in our own performance, but we will trust in the performance of Jesus Christ dying on the cross, rising from the dead, and reigning over the universe.

(Galatians 3:14) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

When we believe God and what He has done for us personally through Christ; then we are “in Christ Jesus.” We receive the Holy Spirit into our lives as God promised. All of these blessings come to us through faith, through believing God’s Word, and not through our mere human efforts to obey rules and rituals. The

Israelites tried ritualism as a way of life before Christ came, and they failed to be right with God. Their rituals only pointed to the coming of the Messiah and their need of salvation through the Messiah's coming. Israelites and Gentiles can receive the promised Holy Spirit only through faith in Jesus Christ; by doing so, they can truly love God and others as God intends.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. According to Paul in Galatians 3:1-14, how do we receive the Holy Spirit into our lives? Why do we need the Holy Spirit in our lives?
2. In Galatians 3:1-14, how many times does Paul use some form of the word "believe" (such as, believe, believed, believing)? Look up the word "believe" in a dictionary. What does the word "believe" mean?
3. Why is believing important? What does Paul say people should believe or need to believe?
4. Look up the word "faith" in the dictionary. What does the word "faith" mean? In Galatians 3:1-14, how does Paul use the word "faith." How are the meanings of the words "believe" and "faith" similar or different?
5. What happens to people when they rely on the works of the law in order to be justified or right with God? How can you recognize people who do this, and how might you help them?

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