

Faith Alone
Galatians 3:1-14

C.J. Mahaney made me aware of some of the following misprints in church bulletins. Here we find the unexpected!

- **“Today, the pastor will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing, ‘Break Forth Into Joy.’”**
- **“Miss Charlene Mason sang ‘I will not pass this way again,’ giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.”**
- **“The senior choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join the choir.”**
- **“Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.”**
- **“Evening massage - 6 p.m.”**
- **“During the absence of our pastor we enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing a good sermon when J.F. Stubbs supplied our pulpit.”**
- **“A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.”**

When you read the text we are in, Galatians 3:1, especially in the *Philips* paraphrase, it appears almost like a misprint! “Oh you dear idiots of Galatia”... (Philips). Idiots? How many of you begin a letter or an email like that? Does Paul mean to say that? Actually, he did. This is not a blooper. Paul is jolting his readers and trying to wake them up.

The argument in chapter 3 is actually far from a blooper. It is *brilliant, biblical, and breathtaking*.

Paul is not questioning their intelligence; he is addressing their

lack of spiritual discernment.

They were not choosing not holding on to the essential doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, but instead were opting for the Judaizers' teaching of Jesus + something else, namely circumcision and keeping the law.

In chapter 3, Paul covers 4,000 years of history – Abraham to Christ to the present. It appears like one of Paul's most complex chapters. One commentator said verse 20, alone, **has 300 possible interpretations!** (Nate will do it!).

But don't miss the forest for the trees. The argument is really simple actually.

We are saved/justified by faith alone in Christ alone.

Last week he introduced this subject in **2:16-17... READ.**

Justification means that God accepts us by trust in Jesus, not anything we do. I must receive Christ's righteousness by faith alone. It was the great doctrine of the protestant reformation.

In ch. 3: He argues for it by appealing with **3 proofs:**

- Proof of **Experience** (1-5)
- Proof of OT **Scripture** (6-14)
 - Members of Ab's family by faith (6-9)
 - Curse of the law removed by Christ's death (10-14)
- Proof from **Salvation History** (15-29)

“faith” or “believe” or “believing” appears **no less than 17x!**

It's like running laps. We will take four laps, and you will come back to this like the starting line. Or, like the **chorus of the song**.

This doctrine is the foundation of our gospel. The idea that

righteousness is **given by God**, not earned by man opened for **Martin Luther the “very gate of paradise.”** He called it passive righteousness. It is received by faith not works, even though it leads to works. May see paradise today.

**Justification is by Faith Alone, Not Works of the Law:
2 Proofs**

Proof #1: The Argument from Experience (3:1-5)

Paul asks the Galatians 5 questions on how they came to know Christ to show them the folly of reverting to legalism.

o **Question of Spiritual Discernment (v. 1)**

1a: Imagine being in a counseling session with Paul. You have legalistic tendencies; being tempted to leave simple faith in Jesus for a cult, what would you expect the Apostle to say? **“You dear idiot!” “Who has bewitched you?” “Who cast a spell over you?”** This word "ebaskanen" means to give someone the evil eye, to cast a spell." Paul knew they were not enchanted but the language suggests evil influence.

He says **“You can’t see the obvious!”** What are you hypnotized? It is Jesus and Jesus alone, not Jesus plus anything.

- **Is Paul out of control?** No. Jesus did it! **“Oh foolish ... slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”**
- **Is this love?** You need to balance his expression with others: He calls them *brothers*. He calls them his *children*. He loves the Galatians. **The reason for this shocking language is that Paul doesn’t consider this to be a minor issue!**

Paul thought it was **illogical, absurd, foolish, and unthinkable** that the Galatians would begin by believing in the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and opt for the Jesus+the law message of the false teachers.

- The Galatians are a vivid illustration of how people get lured into cults – by their emotions. “I thought the new age mushroom cult was a great group of people. They even used the Bible.” Use your head.

1b: What were they not thinking about? The cross of Christ. They had taken their eyes off of Jesus!

The word "portrayed" comes from the world of advertising. The Greeks used it to refer to public notice when a property was for sale. What the Galatians had seen was the "Jesus billboard!" from Paul's preaching. He painted a picture.

Paul's preaching was so cross-centered that it was as though they had seen Jesus Christ as crucified. It memorable, powerful, & vivid! They saw him & treasured him.

It reminds me of Lloyd-Jones and Jonathan Edwards, “make the truth real, not just clear” (JE), “goal is not information but impression” (MLJ).

This caused me to reflect on my preaching. Does it look like this? (cf., 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

And if the Galatians had worked the gospel deeply into their heart, then they would have known that Christ did everything necessary for our salvation and the only thing required of them was to receive the good news by faith. To add good works to the cross of Christ, as a basis for salvation, was an offense to the cross.

o Question of the Spirit's Initial Work (2)

This question concerns conversion, or initiation into the faith.

It's pretty simple: How did you receive the Spirit? This is

another way of speaking of conversion; to Paul justification and regeneration are inseparable – the Spirit indwells a justified person. To possess the Holy Spirit is to be a Christian (Rom. 8:9).

The decisive evidence that salvation is by faith alone is your reception of the Holy Spirit. This is the mark that you belong to God.

This was Peter's argument as well in **Acts 15:8**, that they could not refuse to accept the Gentiles because they received the Spirit. That's what made them Christians.

They "heard with faith" the message that "requires faith" (Rom. 10:17), not works of the law.

By the way, this is why we preach and witness.

o **Question of Spiritual Growth (3)**

Now, Paul moves from the initial work of conversion, where God pronounces us righteous, to the process of *sanctification* where God conforms us to Christ-likeness. These two are distinct, justification and sanctification, but must never be separated.

Regarding Luther's teaching on justification, Duke George of Saxony said, "**It is a great doctrine to die by, but a lousy one to live with!**" (Ryken, 81). It is a great comfort in death, but what do you do in the meantime?

How are you to move forward in the Christian life? Some think that you are justified by faith, but now you are sanctified by works. No, you are sanctified the same way. Paul says you don't move forward "by the flesh."

To the Colossians Paul says,

“As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” **You walk in him, just as you received him – by faith in Jesus. Love Jesus. Focus on Jesus. All of the Christian I've is by grace through faith. It is not performance based.**

Aren't works important? Absolutely. But they are the result of faith. Works are the fruit of faith, as James says. Real faith will have works. But the issue here in Galatians is “real faith.”

Let me put it like this. The way you produce fruit in the Christian life, which is another way to say grow spiritually, is not by focusing on fruit, but by focusing on Jesus. These fruits grow wholistically and internally.

Both justification and sanctification are the result of the **Spirit and faith. READ 2:20 - "Christ in me ... By faith"**

Actually, justification is a great doctrine to live by! Gerard Forde, "Sanctification is the art of getting used to your justification."

o **Question of Suffering (4)**

What Paul envisions here is simple: when they were converted, they received persecution because they said these false teachers were of no merit; that salvation was by faith alone.

Paul asks, “Was all that in vain?” Paul hopes that his provoking of them will lead them to turn back to the truth.

o **Question of the Spirit's Ongoing Work (5)**

Paul asks them about the work of miracles. How did you see those happen? There is no question as to the work of miracles. How were they happening to the Galatia? By faith.

What ever he is referring to here, it is clear that these dramatic works were the result of faith not observance to

works of the law.

Faith is how you begin and continue in the Christian life.

You don't start by legalism (earning forgiveness), and you don't continue by legalism, or ritual (earning favor and merit).

We practice good deeds NOT to earn forgiveness, but *because we are forgiven; because we are accepted*, we are declared righteous; because we are loved, because we have life in the Spirit, we obey God. We live daily by faith that we are who Scripture says we are.

And by the way, the works here are not “works of compassion” or “mercy” but religious works that supposedly gained standing with God & his people, like circumcision.” No religious work puts you in right standing with God.

Proof #2: The Argument from the OT: 2 Examples (3:6-14)

Now Paul moves to a higher source of authority than experience to make his argument: The inspired Word of God. He begins with Abraham, but will also speak of Moses, Deut., Leviticus, Habakkuk to show throughout Scripture salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. They were bringing up the OT and Paul decides to explain the OT to them.

The law was never intended to justify people before God. Many people misunderstand this: the OT does not teach salvation by works of the law.

Want proof? Just trek with Paul here, he refutes that idea. People were saved by faith alone; they looked forward, we look backward – both look to Christ.

Here we see the amazing unity of the Bible, and Jesus as the hero of the entire Bible.

A. OT Example #1: We Are Members of Abraham's Family by Faith (6-9)

- **Abraham was justified by faith alone, not works of the law (2:6, 3:15-18)**

Genesis 15:6 takes center stage here. And it is also cited in Romans 4, and James 2.

How was Abraham saved? Was it by circumcision? No. He was counted righteous before that was established.

Paul:

*Father Abraham, has many sons,
& Many sons has Father Abraham,
& I am one of them, and so are you (by faith alone not works of law)
So let's all praise the Lord*

False Teachers

*Father Abraham has many sons
And many sons has father Abraham
And I am one of them, but you are not,
So let's all get together for a procedure we call circumcision and try to
keep the law.*

6w: How was it? "he believed God and it was counted to him as righteous" (Gen 15) – (Read Romans 4). He was justified before he did any work! "God justifies the ungodly."

The False teachers loved to cite Gen. 17 about circumcision. That this was the sign of the covenant. Paul's approach is brilliant, he goes back to Gen. 15, which was before circumcision! He says "you don't know your own Bible!"

Abraham the great patriarch was justified while he was an uncircumcised Chaldean. And so will the Gentiles be. Abraham was a pagan, not an Israelite initially. He had no merit. He had done know works. God saved him by grace. He

is a pattern of all the rest! Abraham believed by faith and was declared righteous.

Notice 3:15-18: Not only did circumcision come after faith, but the law as well. The law came after God declared Abraham righteous. God didn't suddenly change the way he justified people. No, the law was added to point out sin; not as a means of salvation. It was temporary; it showed the need for sacrifice and atonement.

Paul also shows here that the offspring is Christ (the word "offspring" can be used as a collective singular that has a plural sense (Rom. 4:18) but can also have a singular meaning, as here). Paul knows that only in Christ would the promised blessings come to the Gentiles; that is the prophecies would come true in Christ. "Abraham saw my day and was glad" (Jn. 8:56).

- **We are justified by faith alone not works of the law (2:7-9)**

7: We are spiritual children of Abraham. We become part of the spiritual family of Abraham by faith. We are soul-brothers spiritually, not biological brothers ethnically.

8a: Abraham is a living prophecy of the rest of Scripture: God justifies us by grace through faith apart from works of the law.

Notice: Scripture is personified as a person. "Scripture" doesn't foresee, God does. *What Scripture says, God says.*

8b: The **Gospel** was preached beforehand to Abraham. The Gospel goes back to Abraham, indeed to Gen. 3:15, and echoes into eternity. *Ultimately, the good news in the OT is the good news about Jesus Christ.*

The Nations. Notice what else the promise to Abraham involved: the nations. God's design from the beginning was to save people from every tribe and nation who believed like

Abraham.

Paul cites Gen. 12 and 18:18 combined to make this point.

I have been asked before *"Where did you get your passions for missions." The Bible. That's all you need to do. Read it.*

"If you take missions out of the Bible, you won't have anything left but the covers"

Acts 2: This promise of all nations blessed through Christ, the offspring of Abraham, is pictured in several places, including Acts 2. Notice all the names.

[9] Parthians and **Medes** and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, [11] both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”
(Acts 2:9-11 ESV)

All of these present on the day the church was born! Many of these listed were from what are Islamic countries today.

Consider the Medes (or Kurds: many today in Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey). **My friend Dr. Edens was a missionary in the Middle East for several years. They were translating the Bible along with a local guy, who was not a Christian. As they got to Acts 2, he dropped his pencil. And said, "What does this say in Greek?" It says "Medes." What does it say in English?" Medes. The Medes are the Kurds. He said, "On the day the church was born, my people were there?" Yes, my friend. This Gospel is not reserved for one nationality, but for the nations.**

We have a global God, and a global gospel. We must take it to the nations, for God desires to save people from every tribe.

So that's example #1 of the Gospel in the OT. When you see Abraham you are seeing an example of the Gospel. He believes. He is counted righteous. He lives a new life, a life of faith.

B. OT Example #2: Curse of the Law Removed by Christ (3:10-14)

o We failed to obey God's law (10-12)

These verses speak of how the law cannot save us; and that no one can keep the law.

He mentions a “curse” here. “Curse” A divine curse is upon those who do not obey God’s law.

- Voodoo? Witchdoctor? No. Biblical history**
- Gen 3: serpent, earth, childbirth**
- The giving of the law**

10-12: Those who rely on the law are cursed. Why?

- 1. Because one must keep the law perfectly (10). And no one does!**
- 2. Because justification is by faith, not works of the law (11). (Quoted 3x in NT – key to Luther’s “discovery”).**
- 3. Because the law and faith are incompatible (12)**

Verse 10, “Cursed is everyone...” comes from Deut. 27. Two mountains: Cursed and Blessed – Levites in the middle and pronounced them and the people said, “Amen.”

- Summarize: Deut. 28:1-6– giving the law. He attaches these conditions – if you obey me, there is nothing but**

blessing...

- **BUT** Deut. 28:15-19. Curses. “Joy to the World: *He comes to make His blessings flow,*
- *Far as the curse is found.*” How far do we find that curse?
“The whole creation groans.”

Not just atheist, people who hate God – people who try to obey the law – go to church ... and the law says in every attempt: **“guilty.”**

“This curse should sound like hundreds of **nuclear warheads** headed right for the U.S. We are under a curse.” - Sproul

We need this curse lifted from us? How? We go running for cover. And where do we run? Christ! He took what was due us.

Someone would take our place.

And only one could do this: only the God-man could do this. Only his blood would be sufficient.

o **Christ became the curse for us (13)**

The criminal was placed on a tree (Deut. 21:23) as an indication that was condemned as a transgressor. This was a visible symbol of rejection for everyone to see.

To be put on the tree, was to declare that this person is “cursed” or “forsaken by God.” He took not only our curse, though, he became a curse: he *become the* incarnation of the curse of God.

Even **the sun stopped shining** and Jesus cried out of rejection: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The Jews couldn't accept Jesus as Messiah. They wondered, 'How could the Messiah be cursed by God?' Well, they missed it:

**He was not cursed because of his sin;
he was cursed because he bore man's sin in his own body on
the tree.**

His curse reaches throughout the earth and covers all who are not covered by the righteousness of Jesus.

Flee to the cross! Be covered in Christ.

We deserve that curse but Jesus Christ took your curse. Jesus died your death. Jesus paid your penalty. He took your wrath.

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;

Lifted up was He to die;

Spotless Lamb of God was

"It is finished!" was His cry;

He; "Full atonement!" can it

Now in Heav'n exalted high.

be?

Hallelujah! What a Savio

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

This is the great doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Jesus took God's wrath for us; he satisfied God's justice; he was our atoning sacrifice. Our curse was transferred to him, his righteousness to us. What love! What freedom!

What wondrous love is this,

O my soul, oh my soul,

What wondrous love is this,

Oh my soul!

What wondrous love is this,

that caused the Lord of bliss

To bear the dreadful curse

For my soul, for my soul,

To bear the dreadful, curse for my soul.

Yet many deny this great doctrine. *In Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, Joel Green and Mark Baker say, “We believe that the popular fascination with and commitment to penal substitutionary atonement has had ill effects in the life of the church and in the United States and **has little to offer the global church and mission** by way of understanding or embodying the message of Jesus Christ.”

It has everything to offer the global church! It’s the only thing we have to offer the global world! That’s why we must take the Gospel to the nations. The reason many people don’t do global missions is that they don’t have a Gospel worth preaching to the nations!

“We talk of the second coming; half the world has never heard of the first!”

Benefits of Christ’s Death:

- **Redemption (13)**
- “redeemed” is drawn from the commercial world
- “purchasing things” “buying back a captive” “liberating a slave through a ransom payment” “(McKnight).
- He purchased you – by paying the price on the bloody tree
- You were a captive until he freed you, by his death
- He liberated you from the curse of the law

○ **The blessing of Abraham to us (14)**
He did it not just for Jewish Christians but for every Gentile Christian who comes to Christ by faith.

What is the blessing? The blessing of justification (synonymous in v. 8) and possessing the Holy Spirit – the blessing of eternal glory.

- **The promised Spirit in us**

By faith, we receive the promised Holy Spirit. Again the Spirit and justification are united here.

Paul has already quoted Habakkuk, “the righteous shall live by faith” and now he states it again, “by faith we receive the Spirit” another way of speaking of salvation.

You must be in Christ to **receive this salvation**? How can you be in Christ? *By faith alone.*

Two Roads: Two Destinies of Mankind for All Human History

- If you try to merit eternal life; earn forgiveness by your performance, by your legalism you have one destiny: **curse**.
- If you give up, and simply believe, by God’s grace, in the perfect work of Christ, you will not endure the judgment of God; but instead only receive the **blessing** of God!

Not just faith to be saved; but we “live by faith!” Think of Abraham and the book of James, and Hebrews 11 – **his saving faith was expressed in radical obedience!**

- “It is faith alone that saves but that faith is never alone.”
- Saving faith will be an obedient faith. Abraham believes (Gen. 15:6), and then in Gen. 22 he is offering his son!
- So, the idea that justification by faith alone is a license to live misses it. You don’t understand grace or faith: those who have been saved by faith alone are forever changed.

- It's not just our position that changes before God; our hearts change within. HE PLACES THE SPIRIT WITHIN US. We aren't earning a thing, we are living by faith in God's promises.

Application on 3:1-14:

1. Love the gospel. "God justifies the ungodly by faith." Let justification be your good news when you are doubtful of God's love or discouraged by the pressures of life.
2. Share this gospel. It is for the nations.
3. Live by the Spirit and faith. It's how we entered, and how we continue.
4. Non-Christian: receive Christ as your righteousness.