

O Foolish Galatians Galatians 3:1-14

The book of Galatians is very much like the book of Hebrews in that it presents a contrast between Judaism and Christianity. And Judaism does not compare favorably.

Now there is a difference in the two books and the difference is that Hebrews is written to Hebrew believers and Galatians is written to Gentile believers. And therefore the book of Hebrews is a very elaborate dismantling of all the various aspects of Judaism because it is written to Jewish converts.

On the other hand the book of Galatians is directed primarily to Gentile converts who don't have nearly as much familiarity with the intricacies of the Mosaic Law.

So if you want a thorough discussion of the Levitical Priesthood and the animal sacrifices and the intricacies of that old religious Jewish system, you would go to the book of Hebrews rather than Galatians.

Galatians is more a consideration of the Mosaic Law System as a whole. The book of Galatians asks the question, "Why in the world would anyone voluntarily put themselves under the Mosaic Law System when salvation by grace is available in Christ.

Why would you want to do it? That is the question of Galatians. Jewish teachers have come behind Paul and are trying to teach the Gentile converts in Galatia that they need to be circumcised to be saved. "Come on, all you Gentile converts. Join us under the Mosaic Law. Come on over to our side. Be circumcised. Put yourself under our law."

And the book of Galatians asks, "Why in the world would the Gentiles want to be under such a system? Why would they want to sign up for death and condemnation? (II Cor.3:7, 9) Not one person in Israel was ever able to obey the law (except for Jesus). And yet, they say, "Come, Gentiles, adopt our laws as your own."

Now I want to begin in Chapter 2 and verse 19 where Paul says, "I am dead to the law." By this, Paul is saying, I have nothing to do with the law anymore. I once had something to do with it. I was a Jew. I was born under the law. I advanced in the law beyond my peers. I gloried in the law. I was married to the law. But now, my marriage to the law has ended - not by divorce, but by death. I have died to that old system and it has no claims on me any longer.

Now when Paul says, "I am dead to the law," this is the strongest possible language that he could use to describe his relationship to the law.

Example: If a son or a daughter disobeys a parent and rebels and goes away and then one day comes home and the parent says, "I am sorry, as far as I am concerned you are dead to me." This would be the strongest way to say, "I have nothing to do with you any longer."

And Paul says,

I am dead to the law.

The word law is used in many ways in the Scriptures. Sometimes it is used to refer to the Ten Commandments. Sometimes it is used to refer to the first five books of the Bible. Sometimes it is used to refer to the entire collection of Scriptures. Sometimes it is used as a principle like "the law of gravity."

But here in Galatians, when Paul uses the term law, almost always he is referring to that whole system of things that came under the Mosaic Law. He is referring to Judaism and all of those Jewish requirements that came by Moses. He is referring to the tabernacle and the priesthood and the dietary requirements and the feast days and the sacrifices. He is talking about everything that derived from the Mosaic Law. The whole system stands or falls together.

And Paul says, "I am dead to the law." He is not dead to part of it, but he is dead to all of it. Now I have tried to convince you that that whole system, called the law, has passed away. It was always designed to be temporary (Gal.3:19). It was a

prelude to Christ only. It was never the real thing. It was always the picture.

And the moment that I say that, then someone will charge me with antinomianism. And let me answer that charge in advance. There is no way that I am suggesting that you have no moral duties and obligations to Christ. The principles of his kingdom are higher principles than those which were found under the law.

The Mosaic Law did not bring moral principles to the world. God's morality is eternal morality. What God expects of his creatures is eternal. When Adam disobeyed God he violated the law of God. When Cain murdered Abel, he violated the law of God. And they did it all before the Mosaic Law ever came along. The moral law of God existed before the Mosaic Law ever came and it continues after the Mosaic Law passed off the scene. Adultery was a sin before, during and after the Mosaic Law. So when we say that the Mosaic Law has passed away, we do not say that the moral attributes of God have passed away. We do not say that we now live in a state of lawlessness. But we say that the Mosaic Law ran its course and then expired. That whole system of religion passed away with the coming of Christ.

Now when Paul says that he is dead to the law, he is saying that he has exited that system and entered another system. He is saying, I am no longer under the Mosaic Law and Judaism but I am under Christ and Christianity.

Now this would seem to be a no brainer.

If you were asked, "Would you rather have Jesus as your Mediator or would you rather have Moses," you would be foolish to choose Moses.

If you were asked, "Would you rather be under the strict requirements of the law, or would you rather be under the grace of the gospel," you would be foolish to choose the law. If you were asked, "Would you rather be saved by works or by faith," you would surely choose faith. If you were asked, "Would you rather try to make it by means of your flesh, or would you prefer the help of the Spirit of God," you would choose the Spirit.

But the Galatians were considering adoption of the Mosaic Law. Can you believe it? And Paul says,

O foolish Galatians.

Galatians 3:1

And so we see first of all,

I. The foolishness of conforming to the Jewish religion.

It is a very foolish man who turns down the free gift of God's grace under the gospel of Christ, in favor of the impossible requirements of the law. For fifteen hundred years the Jews have not been able to meet the demands of the law. The law has killed them. The law has been a minister of death to them. And now, you want to be under their law?

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?

Now when your children are about to do something stupid, sometimes you just ask them stupid questions to try to make them understand their stupidity.

Example: A few years ago, my son climbed out of the second floor window, took a running start and leaped over about ten feet of patio into the deep end of the pool. By the sheer grace of God he didn't slip coming off the roof, or misjudge his jump and land on concrete. Now if I had seen him before he jumped I might have asked him some questions to try to dissuade him from jumping. Questions like, "If a head hits concrete after a fall of about 15 feet, does it crack the skull?" and, "Does it hurt when you splat on concrete?"

Now the answer to these questions is obvious. Yes, heads crack when they hit concrete. And, it hurts when your body splats on concrete. These are called rhetorical questions. The answer to the question is obvious, but the answer points out your stupidity. And in the next four verses Paul asks the Galatians four rhetorical questions. The answers to the questions are obvious, but they serve to remind them how stupid it is to go back under the law.

Question Number One

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:2

Now it is obvious that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith. They were never under the Mosaic Law. They never were required to be circumcised. They never were required to bring animal sacrifices. They never were under any eating restrictions. And so, when they were saved and received the Spirit, it had nothing to do with the Mosaic Law at all.

Example: You remember the case of Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a Gentile. And God appeared to Cornelius in a vision and told him to send some men to Joppa to find Peter. Now the next day, Peter had a vision. And in that vision, Peter was told that all of the unclean animals were now clean. So Cornelius' men showed up and Peter went with them back to Cornelius' house. And there, Peter told Cornelius about Christ. And while Peter was speaking to them, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household. And suddenly, these Gentiles began to speak in tongues. Why, Peter and some of the Christian Jews that were with him were astonished that these Gentiles were also given the Holy Spirit.

Note: In these early days, the sign that someone had received the Holy Spirit was tongues – speaking in other languages. The Jews never would have believed that God would save Gentiles. But God demonstrated the gift of the Holy Spirit by the sign of tongues.

And so, these Gentiles were saved and received the Holy Spirit here in Acts 10 by faith alone. They did not have to be circumcised or to meet any of the Jewish regulations. And the same thing was true when Paul preached in Galatia. Paul didn't ask them to become Jews. Paul didn't place any of the requirements of the law on them. Paul simply preached Jesus and him crucified. And the Gentiles in Galatia were saved and they received the Holy Spirit.

And so, Paul asks them,

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 13:2

And of course, the Galatians would have to say, “We received the Spirit by the hearing of faith.”

Question Number Two

Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Galatians 3:3

God saved you by the Spirit, are you going to grow up into maturity by another method? Paul intends for the answer to this question to be obvious. If you got saved by the power of the Spirit, do you now live the Christian life by the power of the flesh – that is, by the law?

Question Number Three

Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.

Galatians 3:4

What Paul means here is that these Gentiles have suffered persecution because they believed in Christ. Now, after they have already suffered such things, are they going to give up their faith?

Example: What if a man says, “I’m going to beat you, if you don’t give me \$100.00.” You are unwilling to give him \$100.00. So, he beats you and drives away leaving you lying in the parking lot. And then, after you have already been beaten, you decide to give him the \$100.00. So, you mail him a check. Do you see how you received a beating in vain?

So Paul asks the Galatians,

Have ye suffered so many things in vain?

Question Number Four

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:5

Remember that in these very early days of the church there were apostles ministering and there were very special gifts (like miracles) to authenticate the message. (See Acts 14:1-3 and Acts 14:8-10) It is obvious that all of these miracles were accomplished not by the law, but by the hearing of faith.

So, all of these rhetorical questions are designed to show the Galatians the stupidity of their inclination to join the Jews in their religion.

II. The foolishness of ignoring the example of Abraham.

Abraham was the most revered of all figures in the Jewish religion. Everything goes back to Abraham. The Mosaic Law came along 430 years after Abraham yet the Jews trace their roots back to Abraham. And so Paul says, "You like Abraham so much, consider Abraham. Was Abraham saved by the regulations of the Mosaic Law? Abraham had no tabernacle, no temple worship, no ten commandments, no brazen altar, no altar of incense, no Levitical priests. Abraham lived 430 years before Moses and the Law.

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Galatians 3:6

You see, this is the way Abraham was saved. God told him that his seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. And Abraham believed God. (Gen.15:6)

Now let me also point out that Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness in Genesis 15:6. But Abraham was not circumcised until Genesis 17. So, even Abraham was not saved because he was circumcised. He was circumcised because he was saved. It was a sign of the covenant of salvation which God made with Abraham and his

seed. (See Romans 4:11) Let me ask some questions:

1. When Abraham believed God and righteousness was imputed to him, was he uncircumcised or circumcised? (Uncircumcised)
2. When Abraham believed God and righteousness was imputed to him, was he under the regulations of the Mosaic Covenant? (No, Moses came 430 years later.)
3. According to Romans 4:11 what was the purpose of circumcision? (It was a sign of his faith.)
4. What was the significance of Abraham having faith and being saved before he was circumcised? (So that he would be the father of the faithful, even of the uncircumcised.)

The Jews made a horrendous mistake. They thought Abraham was the father of the circumcised. Oh No! Abraham is the father of the faithful. Being a child of Abraham is not a physical thing at all. It is a spiritual thing.

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:7

The Jews forgot what circumcision was. It was a sign of faith. Just because they were circumcised did not make them children of Abraham. Faith made them a child of Abraham.

They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

John 8:39

Of course, the works of Abraham were works of faith.

5. Because Jews were circumcised, did this make them children of Abraham? (No)
6. What makes someone a child of Abraham? (Faith)

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Galatians 3:8

7. What was preached to Abraham? (The gospel)

So, here is the flow of the argument so far:

O foolish Galatians, why are you even listening to these teachers who are telling you that you must conform to the Jewish religion and be circumcised? Don't you know remember that when I first came and preached to you that you received the Holy Spirit by faith? O foolish Galatians, consider the example of Abraham. He was saved because he believed the gospel. The Mosaic Law did not even exist then.

III. The foolishness of considering the Mosaic Law for salvation.

A. The Law curses you.

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.

Galatians 3:10

Verse 10 is a quote from Deut. 27:26. The people were about to cross the Jordan and enter the land of Canaan. And when they crossed the river the Levites were to speak to the people and to curse them. (vs. 15-26) Is this not amazing! On the day of their greatest achievement, entering the Promised Land, they are promised a curse if they ever break the law.

You see,

As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse . . . Notice the perfection that is required under the law. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

B. The law cannot justify.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.

Galatians 3:11

Even the Old Testament testified that justification only comes by faith. (Hab.2:4)

C. The law is a “doing” kind of system.

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Galatians 3:12

Example of the law system: Back when men were experimenting with flying machines, they were trying to invent a machine that would fly. And the first efforts involved a man who would strap wings on his shoulders. And he would get a bicycle and he would pedal his bicycle over the edge of a cliff. And he would fall like a rock. And the answer under the law is, “pedal faster.”

You see, the law provided no power whatsoever. You had to furnish all the power. I suppose if you could get up enough speed on your own, you could pedal out over the cliff and you would fly. But under the law you could never get your bicycle going fast enough. Every time you go over the cliff, you are cursed. You fall down the side of the mountain and break your bones every time.

But under the gospel of Christ, He takes us out from under that law system of things.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law . . .

Galatians 3:13

Under the gospel system we step on a commercial airliner piloted by Christ. And we sit down in our seat and we ride by faith. And that airliner is powered by someone else. It is powered by the Spirit of God. And while we sit in our seat believing, the airliner takes off the end of the runway, over the cliff and it soars in the sky! You see how the law has no power, but the gospel has power.

Let me leave you with a quote from John Bunyan.

“Run, John, run;
The Law commands;
But gives us neither feet nor hands.
Far better news the gospel brings;
It bids us fly and gives us wings.”

John Bunyan