

GALATIANS CHAPTER THREE

1. How were the Galatians “foolish?”

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain?” (Galatians 3:1-4)

They were behaving illogically, contradicting themselves by simultaneously maintaining reliance on Christ and on the Law He ended.

2. What transpired that diverted them from truth?

Paul wanted to know “*Who has bewitched you?*” (Galatians 2:1), which means a third party had changed their mind; they hadn’t arrived at this conclusion from any independent study of Scripture.

He compared this change of mind to being put under the spell of witchcraft. As God perceives it, rebellion is equal to witchcraft in sinfulness (1st Samuel 15:23).

3. How had Christ’s crucifixion been portrayed before their eyes?

“Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified” (Galatians 3:1) refers to the fact that an eyewitness of Christ had preached His death to them. They saw it (Hebrews 2:9) with eyes of faith (2nd Corinthians 5:7).

4. If Paul wanted to know one thing, why did he ask five questions?

“This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 2:2-5).

All the questions were rhetorical, not intended to be answered, but to stir them to contemplation, all with the same goal. They got where they were spiritually through the Spirit of Christ (John 6:63; 2nd Corinthians 3:17), not through the Old Law.

5. How did Abraham obtain his righteousness?

“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Galatians 3:6). His trust in God’s promises was counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:1-6) before circumcision was ever taught him by God (Genesis 17:9-14). This does not at all mean that obedience was not required, for the same Scripture is quoted elsewhere in the New Testament to prove that works are necessary (James 2:21-24).

6. Who are Abraham’s true sons?

“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). Genealogy is now religiously irrelevant (Luke 3:8; Titus 3:9), as is circumcision (1st Corinthians 7:19). Faith matters.

7. How was *“the gospel preached to Abraham?”*

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (Galatians 3:8-9).

In promise (Genesis 12:3), God had foretold to Abraham the good news for all people everywhere, but He only required circumcision of Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:10). Thus, the good news did not impose circumcision on anyone else.

8. How are those accountable to the law all cursed?

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them’” (Galatians 3:10-12).

No one living under that law ever kept it perfectly (James 2:10-11), and so they were cursed, a fact the law itself asserted (Deuteronomy 27:26). This is in stark contrast to the blessings intended by God which were mentioned previously.

Even the Old Covenant informs its readers that life comes from faith (Habakkuk 2:4). When people under that covenant exercised such faith that they took action according to God’s will (Hebrews 11; James 2), they were rewarded.

9. How did Christ redeem us from that curse?

“Christ has 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’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13-14).

The Law of Moses stated that a hanged man was cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23), and Jesus was such a Man, hanged on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). Thus, Jesus became cursed, and the only reason He did so was on behalf of sinners who deserved that curse, not due to any deserving on His part. Thus, He has *“become a curse for us.”* This verse plainly teaches the vicarious nature of Christ’s suffering; He died in our place, as all of Scripture affirms (Isaiah 53:4-6, 11; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; 1st Peter 2:24; 3:18), despite the prominence of certain preachers who deny this manifest fact.

10. What comparison illustrates the validity of the covenant God made with Abraham?

“Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it” (Galatians 3:15).

Contract law is the allegory. Conditions cannot be added to a contract once it is signed. If it is axiomatic concerning the covenants of men, then how much more so is it true of covenants handed down by God?

11. Which of Abraham’s seed were the promises spoken to? Which of his seed were the promises about?

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

Abraham received the promises several times over (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:15-16; 15:5, 7; 17:5-8; 22:17-18), his son Isaac received them (26:3-4), too, and Isaac's son Jacob also received them (28:13-14).

The promise of a nation (12:2) was about all of Abraham's descendants through Isaac (21:12). The promise of land, which was Canaan specifically (17:8), applied to Jacob's, that is Israel's, children (28:13). The promise of all nations blessed in Abraham's Seed (22:18) meant in Jesus Christ, particularly. The Hebrew word translated "seed" can be singular or plural, like "fish," "deer," or "bison" in English. Paul wasn't arguing from the original language; rather, he was providing newly inspired insight into the meaning of God's promise. Christ is the one Seed of Abraham through whom all people may be blessed.

12. Did the Law of Moses amend the promise to Abraham?

"And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Galatians 3:17-18).

The law was not a codicil to an existing will. What came four centuries later did not amend, modify, or add conditions to a promise already ratified. The Law was simply not a part of God's covenant with Abraham to bless all families of the earth; therefore, it could not be imposed on anyone to realize that promise.

13. How much elapsed between the promise to Abraham and the establishment of the law?

Paul mentions 430 years (Galatians 3:17) because that is a figure well grounded in the minds of Old Testament students (Exodus 12:40-41), even though it was sometimes rounded down (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6). It is an understatement, though, since that was merely the amount of time the Israelites spent in Egypt; the number does not take into account the time from God promising Abraham until Jacob and the patriarchs entered Egypt. That was a span of 215 years, insomuch as Abraham was in Canaan 25 years before Isaac was born (Genesis 12:4; 21:5), Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born (25:26), and Jacob was 130 when he entered Egypt (47:9). Therefore, the law was given 645 years after the promise, to be precise, which only deepens Paul's point.

14. If the law was not intended to be permanent, why did it ever exist?

"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions"
(Galatians 3:19).

Sin existed before, but the law made accountability obvious (Romans 3:20; 5:13; 7:7). The grace offered in Christ would not be understandable without there first having been a law with severe consequences for sin.

15. What does the word "added" imply?

"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions"
(Galatians 3:19).

The law of Moses did not exist from the beginning; in fact, 24 centuries passed from Creation until the Law. Not having existed from the beginning, there is no reason to expect it to last until the end. Long-lasting though it was, that Covenant was temporary.

16. What does the word “till” imply?

“It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 3:19).

Just as “added” means it was not from the beginning, so “till” means it would not last forever. It was meant to expire with the advent of Christ, the One who is the Seed.

17. How was the law appointed?

“It was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one” (Galatians 3:19-20).

God made His promises to Abraham directly, without mediation of any kind, whereas the law came through angels (Acts 7:38, 53; Hebrews 2:1-4) and Moses (Exodus 20:19-21) to the children of Israel. Thus, the law was inferior.

18. Was there a contradiction between the law of Moses and the promises to Abraham?

“Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:21-22).

They did not contradict. Each came from God and each served a purpose. Paul was not disparaging the Law at all, but he was ensuring his readers knew that both the past promises and present faith excelled it, and that the Law was done.

19. What capacity did the law function in “before faith came?”

“Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25).

It was a tutor/schoolmaster/guardian, depending on translation. Regardless, it was a temporary role with a specific purpose of preparation and safekeeping, to be dispensed with when something more important happened.

20. How do people become “sons of God?”

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). Faith is required. Elsewhere, Paul wrote, *“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”* (Romans 8:15). So, faith in Christ and dependence on the Holy Spirit’s leadership are what matter.

It is true that the phrase “sons of God” has referred to angels, or at least heavenly beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). And that has led some to assume it usually meant that, as *“when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them”* (Genesis 6:2, 4), but it makes far greater sense to think that people who believed in God chose to marry unbelievers than to think that angels, who cannot marry (Matthew 22:30), married human women.

21. How do people “put on Christ?”

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Those who remain unbaptized are spiritually naked, and likely don’t realize it

(Revelation 3:17). After being baptized, it is necessary to live accordingly (Romans 13:14).

22. Where is real unity found?

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). True oneness is in Christ. He is the great equalizer.

This should not be construed to mean that no differences exist at all, only that all persons have equal access to salvation in Christ and fellowship between one another in Him.

23. What makes someone *“Abraham’s seed?”*

“If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). Physical lineage is now irrelevant (John 8:37-39). What matters is inheriting the promise, and that is fulfilled in Jesus.