

The Evidence for Grace | Galatians 3:1-14

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES

1. What strong word does Paul use to describe the Galatians? Why do you think he calls them this? (v.1)

FOOLISH. In calling the Galatians foolish, Paul did not mean they were morally or mentally deficient (otherwise, the Greek word *moros* would have been used). Instead, Paul used the Greek word *anoetos*, which had the idea of someone who *can* think but *fails* to use their power of perception. In today's culture, we might say, "Don't be stupid, people!"

Paul follows this strong address with a rhetorical question: "**Who has bewitched you?**" The obvious answer is legalistic Jewish believers or Judaizers. Judaizers were Jewish believers who insisted that Gentile believers become Jews to be saved in Christ.

Bewitched has the idea that the Galatians were under some type of spell. Paul didn't mean this literally, but their thinking was so confused – and so unbiblical – that it seemed that some kind of spell had been cast over them.

Barclay translates **bewitched** as **put the evil eye on**. The ancient Greeks were accustomed to and afraid of the idea that a spell could be cast upon them by an *evil eye*.

The evil eye was thought to work in the way a serpent could hypnotize its prey with its eyes. Once the victim looked into the evil eye, a spell could be cast. Therefore, the way to overcome the evil eye was simply not to look at it.

So, in using this phrasing and the word picture of **bewitched**, Paul subtly urges the Galatians to be careful of what and who they gaze upon.

2. What seems to have been Paul's frustration with the Galatians?

Paul says that Jesus Christ was **CLEARLY PORTRAYED AS CRUCIFIED**. The idea behind **clearly portrayed** is something like "billboarded," as if it were a public announcement posted on a wall.

Paul wondered how the Galatians could have missed the message because he certainly made it clear enough to them.

Paul painted another word picture (**Christ crucified**) on which the Galatians should have been focusing their eyes.

3. By appealing to their own experience, what did Paul want the Galatians to realize about the Holy Spirit? (v. 2)

He wanted them to acknowledge that **THEY RECEIVED THE SPIRIT BY BELIEVING WHAT THEY HEARD** and NOT by observing the law.

Some of the Jewish believers in Galatia may have been in Jerusalem at Pentecost and received the Holy Spirit when they believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). They knew that they hadn't received God's Spirit by obeying the Jewish laws.

It is interesting to note that from this point on in the letter to the Galatians, Paul refers to the Holy Spirit 16 times.

4. What do you think it means to try to attain your goal by human effort? (v. 3)

Rather than relying on the Holy Spirit to help us work out our salvation (Phil 2:12-13), we rely on our own efforts by following rules, observances, and works to please God and earn salvation.

Paul has already pointed out two opposing ways to receive God's salvation: by faith in Christ or by works and the law.

Here in verse 3, he compares the two paths in another way: the power of the Spirit versus human effort.

After having begun their spiritual lives in the Spirit, the Galatians were now going backward by relying on their own efforts.

5. A word in verse 4 can be translated as either "experienced" or "suffered." Explain what you think each translation could mean. (v. 4)

EXPERIENCED THESE THINGS IN VAIN – Was it for nothing that God has given his Spirit and blessings on them? After experiencing these things from God, were they going to just walk away?

SUFFERED SO MUCH FOR NOTHING - Apparently, the Galatians had suffered for their faith - probably at the hands of Jews and maybe even Jewish believers. Doesn't their perseverance in the face of suffering mean anything? How could they be so easily turned from it now?

We know that Paul himself suffered persecution in this region. Acts 14 makes it clear that Paul and his companions were persecuted vigorously (Paul even being stoned and left for dead at Lystra) by the Jews when they were among the cities of Galatia. Surely some of this persecution spilled over to the Christian churches Paul established in Galatia.

6. **What has their faith (and not observance of the law) produced? (v. 5)**

RECEIVING GOD’S SPIRIT AND GOD WORKING MIRACLES AMONG THEM.

Paul now puts things in a Heavenly point of view. “Why has God poured out His Spirit? Why has His power been displayed in miracles for you? Hasn’t it been in response to your faith? Surely you don’t think it is because you have perfectly kept all the laws and traditions?”

The coming of the Holy Spirit was confirmed by the miracles done (by Paul) among them. It was a frequent occurrence for signs and wonders to accompany the preaching of the apostles – including Paul.

By this proof of the Spirit’s presence, the Galatians could confirm that Paul’s message was true and faith in Christ was right.

The confirming miracles ceased when the church reached maturity, and much of the New Testament was in written form. By the time the apostles ended their earthly lives, they left in the hands of the church, their valuable testimonies and inspired teaching of God’s word.

7. **Who did Paul give as a prime example of one who gained favor with God through faith? (vv. 6-9)**

ABRAHAM. The father and patriarch of the Jews ***believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.*** So then, Paul reasons, those who believe God and his promises are regarded as children of Abraham.

8. **What does Paul quote from Genesis (see Genesis 15:6) that shows that God favored this man of faith?**

Paul here quoted from Genesis 15:6. ***“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*** It simply shows that righteousness was accounted to Abraham because he believed God. It was *not* because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

We should be careful to say that Abraham’s faith did not make him righteous. Abraham’s God made him righteous, by accounting his faith to him for righteousness.

Generally speaking, ancient rabbis did not really admire Abraham for his ***faith***. They believed he was so loved by God because he was thought to have kept the law hundreds of years before it was given.

For these and other reasons, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved ***their*** point.

The main argument of the Judaizers was that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to become Christians.

Paul exposed the flaw in this argument by showing that real children of Abraham are those who have faith, not those who keep the law. Abraham himself was deemed righteous by his faith.

All believers in every age and from every nation share Abraham's blessing. ***"and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*** (Gen 12:3). This is a comforting promise, a great heritage for us, and a solid foundation for living.

9. What is the difference in believing in God and believing God?

Believing in God generally means believing that He exists and, perhaps, believing He is the Creator and is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

Believing God means you know what He says is true. You trust him, and you know He will keep His promises according to his power, will, and purpose.

When Abraham ***believed God*** it meant more than that he accepted what God said as true; it also meant that he trusted God.

10. According to Paul, who is under a curse? Why? (v. 10)

ALL WHO RELY ON OBSERVING THE LAW are under a curse, for it is written: ***"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*** (Deut. 27:26). You see, because no one under the law ever perfectly kept the law – they are under a curse.

Paul's point is heavy; it weighs us down with a curse. If you are under the works of the law, the only way you can stand approved and blessed before God by the law is to do it, and to do it all. If you don't, you are cursed...cursed by God.

What does ***"cursed"*** mean, exactly? It means condemnation. For that is what Christ removes from us as Paul says in Romans 8:1: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

11. Men were teaching the Galatians that to claim salvation through the Messiah, they must become Jews. How does Paul show that living by faith and living by the law are not compatible? (vv. 11-12)

Habakkuk 2:4: *“The righteous will live by faith.”*

Leviticus 18:5: *“The man who does these things will live by them.”*

Paul says that *clearly* (and he uses this word several times in Galatians) no one is justified by the Law for the righteous will live by faith. And, the Law is not based on faith for the man who does these things (of the Law) will live by them.

The Jews themselves sensed that because no one could keep the law perfectly, salvation could not come through keeping the law. This is why they placed such emphasis on being children of Abraham, essentially trusting in Abraham’s merits (as well as God’s promise to Abraham regarding his descendants) to save them because they sensed that their own merits could not.

Some might come back to Paul and say, “Look, I’ll do the best I can under the law and let faith cover the rest. God will look at my performance, my effort, and my good intentions and credit to me as righteousness. The important thing is that I am really trying.”

Paul proved from the Old Testament itself that this simply isn’t good enough. No; the paths of approval by the law and faith don’t run together, because the law is not based on faith at all.

12. We often say that Christ saves us, but what is meant by Christ *redeemed* us? (v. 13)

Redemption is an important idea. Redemption refers to the payment of a price that sets sinners free.

Redemption came from the practices of ancient warfare. After a battle, the victors would often capture some of the defeated. Among the defeated, the poorer ones would usually be sold as slaves, but the wealthy and important men, the men who mattered in their own country, were held for ransom.

When the people in their homeland had raised the required price, they would pay it to the victors and the captives would be set free. The process was called redemption, and the price was called the ransom.

The image took root in other areas. When a slave had his freedom purchased – perhaps by a relative, perhaps by his own diligent work and saving – this was called “redemption.” Sometimes the transaction took place at a temple, and a record was carved in the wall so everyone would forever know that this former slave was now a redeemed, free man.

Or, a man condemned to death might be set free by the paying of a price, and this was considered “redemption.” Most importantly, Jesus bought us out of defeat, out of slavery, and out of a death sentence to reign as kings and priests with Him forever.

It stops us in our tracks to understand that the price He paid to buy us out from under the curse of the law was the price of Himself. It didn’t just cost Jesus something, even something great – it cost Jesus Himself.

We know that men cursed Jesus as He hung on the cross, but that compares as nothing to how He was cursed by God the Father. He made Himself the target of the curse and set those who believe outside the target.

13. How did Christ become a curse for us? (v. 13)

“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO IS HUNG ON A TREE.”

In the thinking of ancient Israel, there was something worse than being put to death. Worse than that was to be put to death, and to have your corpse left in the open, exposed to shame, humiliation, and scavenging animals and birds.

That is what happened to the bodies of King Saul and three of his sons. You can read about that in 1 Samuel 31:8-13.

When it says **hung on a tree**, it does not have the idea of being executed by hanging from a noose around the neck; but of having the corpse “mounted” on a tree or other prominent place, to expose the executed one to the elements and public disgrace.

“Hung on a tree” was also used in classical Greek and referred to stocks and poles on which bodies were impaled. Paul associates it with execution on the Roman cross.

14. Read Romans 4:4-10. What is the blessing of Abraham? (v. 14)

TO BE COUNTED AS RIGHTEOUS.

In Romans 4, Paul quotes Psalm 32:1, 2.

**“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”**

Jesus received the curse, which we deserved and He did not, so that we could receive the *blessing of Abraham*, which He deserved and we did not. It would be enough if Jesus simply took away the curse we deserved. But He did far more than that; He also gave a blessing that we didn’t deserve.