

Paul's Arguments in Galatians 3

Intro: Chapters one and two might be called the historical argument. They establish that Paul's message did not come from man but from Christ; and that his gospel received the full endorsement of the Jewish Jerusalem church, including Peter who even accepted Paul's correction in his conduct toward Gentile Christians.

In this chapter Paul seeks to establish his case by an appeal to Scripture. By an appeal to the OT Paul shows that nature of the Abrahamic promise and the purpose of the Law and how both point to salvation in Christ by faith.

The Argument from the Galatians' experience (3:1-5)

Paul wonders who has bewitched the Galatians. Paul himself had publicly portrayed to them the crucified Messiah as their hope of salvation. Now he urges them to think about their past experience in following the Lord and recall the source (Gr. "ek") of their blessings. Did the blessings they received come through the keeping of the Law or the hearing of the gospel with faith?

v. 2—How did you receive the Spirit, by works of law (suggesting the works that belong to law and are the expected result of it) or by hearing of faith (the understanding that belongs to faith)? The reception of the Spirit brought about the spiritual life the Galatians had experienced working in them.

v. 3—Did you complete what began by the Spirit working in the heart by the flesh (by mere external conformity to rituals of the Law)? Lenski prefers "with spirit" as the logical opposite of flesh. The Spirit should also complete the work He began in giving spiritual life to the Galatians.

v. 4—Was all the persecution you received from Jews for leaving the Law now in vain (Cf. Ac. 14:22), since you now have decided to place yourselves under the Law?

v. 5—Did God provide the Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of law or by the hearing with faith? (Cf. Ac. 14:3) This rounds out the whole experience of the Galatians: Through the miracles of Paul they came to believe in Christ and through Him received the Spirit that was bearing fruit in them.

The Argument from Abraham's experience:

v. 6—Abraham was reckoned righteous by his faith in the promise of God not by works of law, particularly the Law of Moses. Paul's point is that though Abraham lived under law he was not righteous by perfect law keeping but by forgiveness through faith in the gospel promise God gave him. He believed God and this faith was counted to him "for" righteousness. Paul's point is that this faith was counted "in order that Abraham might possess" righteousness. Perhaps the NASV translates "as" instead of "for" to suggest the idea of substitution. Abraham's works are not adequate to be counted to

him as the righteousness God seeks from man but Abraham receives by faith a righteousness “from God”, and not one intrinsically belonging to him by dint of faith itself. We will study Paul’s fuller development of these themes in Romans 4.

v. 7—Those who seek righteousness by faith and not by works of law are Abraham's true sons (“huios” conveying identification with Abraham’s likeness). Paul develops this theme more fully in Romans 9. By duplicating his faith in the gospel, we demonstrate the likeness that makes us his true children.

v. 8—This is what the Scripture was saying and foreseeing (this is not mere personification of Scripture but the implication that the Scripture is the word of God Himself, what it does He does) in the promise to Abraham, “All the nations shall be blessed in you.” The phrase “All the nations” refers to both the Jews and the Gentiles. “Shall be blessed” refers to justification and all its resultant blessings including liberty from the Law and eternal life. “In you” refers to those who are Abraham's true children. So all believers are children of Abraham and blessed in him.

The Argument from the nature of the Law

v. 10—Those who seek righteousness by works are cursed, because the Law pronounces a curse upon the one who disobeys the law in any way (Deut. 27:26). Thus all sinners are cursed. Even the OT Scripture itself indicated this. God said, through Habbakuk, "The righteous by his faith will live" (B.H.S. Hab. 2:4). The implication is that the righteous will live because he believes God and is not as the proud who rejects God’s word.

v. 11—But the Law itself is not "of faith", a system of pardon but rather "of works", a system of perfection. It said, "He who practices the commands of God will live" (Lev. 18:5). The aorist tense suggests the completing of the doing.

v. 13-14—Christ took the curse pronounced by the Law to the sinner upon himself, just as the Scripture said, “Curse is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21:23). He did so in order that the "blessing" promised to Abraham might come also to the Gentiles as well as the Jew, so that all of us, could receive the Spirit’s promise through faith.

The Argument from the Priority of the Promise

v. 15—Even in terms of human relations, when a covenant is ratified among men, it cannot be set aside or conditions added. It stands as made for the duration of its tenure.

v. 16—The promise God made to Abraham is ultimately spoken to the one person who could bring about these blessings for all the nations. That one person is Jesus Christ. For this reason God chose to say "in your seed" (singular) all nations will be blessed.

v. 17-18—This promise constituted a covenant ratified by God and to which no additions are allowable nor which can be set aside for something else (cf. v. 15). The Law of Moses itself, given at least 430 years later could not

nullify the basis of salvation God had already promised, changing it from one based on promise/faith to law/works. For, if in fact the blessing or inheritance promised to Abraham is based on law, then it can not be based on the promise made to Abraham. If we insist upon one we eliminate the other.

The Argument from the Purpose of the Law

v. 19-20—But someone may ask, "If the Law is unnecessary for salvation, then why was it given?" It was added because of sin but not for salvation from sin. It was added until the seed (descendant) God had promised would come into the world and bring salvation to man. It was given by the mediator Moses. The promise itself was made directly to Abraham and ultimately to his promised seed Christ. No mediator was needed since it was a matter of promise. The acceptance or agreement of others was not involved. But the covenant of Sinai was given indirectly through angels and a mediator to the whole Jewish nation. A mediator functions to represent God to sinners. This calls attention to the very different nature of the two covenants. One was made ultimately between God and his sinless Son; the other between God and the sinful Jews, demanding a mediator. Its purpose was to hold sin in check in order that the promise of God might be fulfilled through the Jewish people. How could the later covenant be regarded as an addition to or substitute for the former?

v. 21-22—To say that the Law was of a different nature from the promise is not say it is contrary to the promise. If the law itself could have brought salvation, then it would have been contrary to the promise God had made. It would have offered another way of salvation. But actually it could not do so. Instead the law shuts up all under sin. It establishes the sinfulness of man showing the need for righteousness by faith in Christ.

v. 23-25—So this was the state of the Jew until Christ came, shut up under sin, shut up to the faith to later come. It was like a prison that kept the Jew in custody. Rather than be contrary to the promise, it becomes a teacher that teaches us our need for the promise. But when the slave-guardian (tutor) has served its purpose, it is no longer needed. The faith has been revealed and thus the tutor no longer serves this purpose.

v. 26—We can now be sons of God by faith. We are baptized into Christ and we thus clothe ourselves with him. This blessing is for all who believe regardless of race, social standing, sex. We are all one in Christ. And if we belong to him, then we are also through faith the sons of Abraham and heirs to the promise of eternal life made to him.

Conclusion: Since Abraham was saved by faith, we are Abraham children by faith in the gospel, not the keeping of the Law. Since Abraham was saved without keeping the Law, then he is the Father of all who believe without distinction. Since the purpose of the law was to reveal sin it was a tutor-guardian until true sonship could be obtained. Inasmuch as sonship is now possible through faith, the Christian is not obligated to the stipulations of the Law as the Judaizers insisted.