

Review Questions (Lesson #7)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. Justification by faith was a new doctrine unheard of until the New Testament.
2. The blessing promised to Abraham was achieved by the works of the Law of Moses.
3. Justification is being acquitted of the charges against us.
4. The Christians in Galatia had suffered from persecution.
5. None of the Galatian Christians had supernatural gifts of the Spirit.

Give short answers:

1. By what means was Jesus Christ “clearly portrayed” before their eyes as crucified?

2. What were the Judaizers actually doing by binding the Law of Moses on the Gentile converts?

3. When we read of “the nations,” who is generally under consideration? _____
4. What is meant by asking “who bewitched you”? Did Paul believe in witches? _____
5. What motivated Jesus to endure the shame and disgrace of the cross? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. To _____ the gospel in favor of any _____, whatever it might be, is sheer _____.
2. The Judaizers’ _____ in pushing Jewish _____ onto the Galatians was ‘only that they might not suffer _____ for the _____ of Christ.
3. Sinful _____ have never been able to _____ fellowship with _____.
4. The impossibility of being _____, who wrote, “the _____ shall _____ by prophet _____, is verified by the _____ by _____.”
5. Once _____ had occurred, the _____ offered no _____, no means for a _____ to be _____.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #7 The Blessings of Justification by Faith (Galatians 3:1-14)

The old country boy mangled the King’s English, but still made a valid point, when he said: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” The gospel of Christ isn’t broken; it doesn’t need fixed. God’s word charges all of us with sin (see Romans 3:23). The gospel provides us with justification (that is, acquittal of the charges against us). Nothing else can do that – not the Law of Moses, not human philosophy, not anything! Therefore, to abandon the gospel in favor of any substitute, whatever it might be, is sheer folly. The churches in Galatia were being pressured by false teachers (Judaizers) to submit to circumcision and Mosaic Law-keeping in order to be saved. In this section, Paul points out what an awful error this was, and why they ought to stay with the one true gospel which he had described in the first two chapters.

“O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you . . .” (v. 1). No, Paul did not believe in witches casting spells! His question is rather sarcastic, implying that their turning from the gospel to Jewish legalism was as though they were under a spell. As this lesson is being written (2019), zombies are all the rage. If Paul were writing to the Galatians today, he might well ask, “Are zombies making you act so foolishly?” “Foolish” indicates they were not thinking clearly. This frustrated the apostle severely, because he and his fellow-evangelists had painted a vivid word picture so that the Galatians, in their minds, could see Jesus crucified (see also 2:21, if justification was through the Law, then Christ died in vain).

All Paul needed to refute the false teachers was an answer to one question: How had the Galatians received the Holy Spirit – by the works of the Mosaic Law, or by faith, which came by hearing the gospel? (3:2-5). The Galatians had seen the gospel confirmed by miracles at the hands of Paul and Barnabas (see Acts 14:3-10). This was the purpose of supernatural gifts (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:2, 3). Evidently Paul had imparted miraculous gifts to some of the Galatians through the laying on of his hands (compare Acts 8:17, 18), for they, too, were exercising those gifts of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:5). Their ability to perform miracles certainly did not come as a result of their Mosaic Law-keeping. Whereas the Law of Moses focused on matters of the flesh (see Hebrews 9:10), the gospel is geared toward the spirit; the Galatians were foolish indeed for thinking they could be perfected (completed, matured) in Christ by going back to a system that dealt

primarily with fleshly issues. In essence, they were rejecting what the Holy Spirit had confirmed as being the will of God!

“Have you suffered so many things in vain . . . ?” (3:4). Paul and Barnabas had risked life and limb when they first evangelized the Galatian cities of Iconium (Acts 14:5) and Lystra (Acts 14:19, 20). We have every reason to expect that their converts there were persecuted also. In fact, Paul plainly states that the Judaizers’ motive in pushing Jewish legalism onto the Galatians was “only that they might not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). If the Galatians surrendered to the Judaizers’ demands, then their earlier endurance of persecution would be entirely without purpose. By saying, “if, indeed, it was in vain,” Paul seems to be wishing that they would return to faithfulness so their suffering would be meaningful, not vain.

Justification by faith wasn’t new by any means. Sinful humans have never been able to merit fellowship with God. Even the great patriarch Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (i.e. for justification, Galatians 3:6 – remember, righteousness and justification are the same word in New Testament language). This quotation from Genesis 15:6 dealt with Abraham’s faith in God to fulfill His promise to give him a son and innumerable descendants. This was centuries before the Law of Moses was given, so Abraham certainly was not justified by Mosaic Law-keeping. The Judaizers erred in thinking that doing the works of the Law made them children of Abraham. Paul corrected such a faulty view: “Therefore know that those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). Though the Judaizers prided themselves on tracing their lineage to Abraham, they failed to act like Abraham (compare John 8:39, 40). Abraham did not seek justification by perfect rule-keeping, but by faith.

Abraham’s justification by faith foreshadowed the justification of the Gentiles by faith. God had “preached the gospel (good news) to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8, quoting Genesis 22:18). The word “nations” (Greek *ethnos*; Hebrew *goyim*) generally refers to those outside of the covenant God made with Abraham. That covenant continued through Abraham’s descendants, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob’s sons became the tribes of Israel. Those outside of Israel were “the nations” or Gentiles. Whereas the Judaizers insisted that Gentile converts to Christianity must submit to circumcision and Mosaic Law-keeping, God’s plan was to justify them by faith, just as he had justified Abraham.

By binding the Law of Moses upon Gentile converts, the Judaizers were not helping them receive the blessing of Abraham, but bringing a curse upon them! “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’” (Galatians 3:10, quoting Deuteronomy 27:26). Of course no one but Jesus ever kept the Law flawlessly; therefore, all were deserving of the death penalty, which is what being “cursed” implied. Once disobedience had occurred, the Law offered no remedy, no means for a sinner to be justified (acquitted of the charges against him). The impossibility of being justified by the Law is verified by the prophet Habakkuk, who wrote, “the righteous shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

But how can a righteous, holy God justify sinners by faith? The answer is that Jesus paid the redemption price. “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’)” (Galatians 3:13, quoting Deuteronomy 21:23). In ancient times, vile criminals were executed, and then their bodies were hung out on trees or stakes in public view (see, for example, Genesis 40:19; Numbers 25:4). This shame and disgrace discouraged others from behaving in like manner and suffering the same fate. Jesus suffered the shame and disgrace that each of us deserves when He hung on the cross as though He were the worst criminal.

Whereas those in ancient times were hung on trees after being executed, Jesus was very much alive when He was crucified, and His body remained on the cross for a time after His death. Why would He endure such complete and shameful humiliation? Hebrews 12:2 informs us of Jesus’ motive: “who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame . . .” Yes, the shame was horrible; but the prospect of saving sinners gave Jesus great joy! His love for sinners sent Him to the cross and kept Him there. He suffered our shame and disgrace so 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 3:14).

The gospel of Christ is, indeed, good news! Although we deserve eternal death, Jesus took our shame and disgrace upon Himself so that we may be justified by our obedient trust in Him. The gospel is not broken! It does not need to be “fixed” by adding the Law of Moses or anything else to it.