

## Gospel, Faith and Freedom (Studies in Galatians)

# Beginning *and* Ending by Faith

### Galatians 3:1-14

We have seen (1) that deliverance from this evil world is not from man; (2) that human freedom cannot be secured by appeal to the church; (3) that justification before God is not available through our works—some inner strength of our own. All this comes from God, by the gospel of Christ, through faith alone, and Paul himself is an illustration of all this.

The emphasis on being justified by faith and not works continues (vv. 7, 11) but with three differences.

- What Paul and Peter can agree on in 2:15-16 is applied to the Galatians (3:1-6).
- How we proceed ('being perfected') can take over from how we begin being justified. Such living is not true to type—i.e., we begin as a believer in God and end as a believer in ourselves.
- Abraham is introduced (as someone appealed to by the false teachers?) as a believer in God's justification from beginning to end.

How can you abandon trust in God's grace in Christ (vv. 1-5)?

- Paul returns to the direct address of 1:6.
- Galatians are bewitched (Gr. *baskaino* = slander, looking with an evil eye or to charm) allowing others to do them wrong. They are no longer thinking truly, unable to apply what they know to their living—foolish.
- The whole matter of their turning to Christ could be in vain (v. 4)—this is serious.
- Paul hopes his questions will arouse real thinking again.

Do you remember the preaching of the cross and the coming of the Spirit when you believed?

- The Galatians have seen the truth of the cross (not just the graphic details), powerfully and with saving effect.
- As at Corinth, the message of the cross is the revelation of God's wisdom power and grace (1 Cor. 2:1-5).
- Paul never forgets Christ who 'loved me and gave himself for me' (2:20).
- The Galatians have received the Spirit, through simple trust (cf. John 7:37-39).
- God conveys forgiveness by coming, as Spirit, to indwell each believer (Acts 2:38).
- At this point, he has in mind the Spirit's work of assurance (4:6; Rom. 8:9-10) rather than sanctification.
- The cross and the Spirit are 'the stuff of life', not just its beginning. By the cross we are saved from the endless cycle of self-justifying and unreal living, and by the Spirit, our life is suffused with purpose and power. Our life is profoundly simple and majestic.

Can you be saved by grace and *stay* saved by works?

- The contrast Paul draws is between *beginning* and being *perfected*, or completed.
- If someone says, 'I trusted in Christ for salvation, and now I live a good life', or, do this or do that, what are they trusting?
- Do we understand and accept that the flesh—ours—is corrupted (Rom. 7:18, 23-24)?
- Given that justification is future as well as present, what we are trusting now to 'get over the line' is, finally, what we believe justifies us.

- Without a conscience washed clean by Christ's blood, we are caught in an endless cycle of self-justification and cannot please God.
- Without a life suffused with the joy of the Spirit, we may feel, and act, like orphans—beloved by none, desperate. In fact, we are sons.

Who is sustaining you now, and doing miracles among you?

- It is by God's acts that you are being sustained.
- Paul has already confessed his on-going faith in the one who loved him.
- There may be some events known to the Galatians and Paul that he refers to.
- Our continuing in faith depends on the Spirit (Rom. 8:12-16).
- Every Christian life is a miracle and should always be thought of in this way.

Can we fall into the trap of being justified by sanctification?

- What is uppermost in our relation to God, in our conscience, and in our service to others—faith or works?
- We *are* to add virtue and other 'works' to faith, but not doing so is the sign we have forgotten we were purged from our sins (2 Pet. 1:2-11).
- The works that 'count' are the expression of love (5:6).
- The latter part of the letter gives abundant indication of this.

Abraham is proof of these things (v. 6).

- First century Judaism focused on Abraham's obedience in offering up his son (Gen. 22; 26:5).
  - 'It is not to be wondered, therefore, that the thought that dominates Judaism: "By your works you will be judged", became its legacy to the post-apostolic Church.' (Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 133-134).
- In fact, Abraham's justification arises because of faith—nothing more (Gen. 15:6).
- A new section begins now that Abraham has been mentioned (3:7—4:7)

It is *faith* that makes us children of Abraham (not law keeping) (vv. 7-9).

- We need the whole Christian story in order to understand our faith.
  - How does it work? What are its pitfalls? What can we expect?
- The story of Abraham is about what God had in mind for us. It would not make sense without Christ, or us who believe.
- We are the nations whom God promised Abraham he would bless.
  - To receive the gospel is to be blessed by God (Acts 3:24-26).
- Abraham is primarily 'the believer', not primarily a law keeper.

The Bible story shows law leads to curse, not blessing (vv. 10-12).

- Jews have made Abraham primarily a law-keeper.
- But law leads to curse—universally, not the blessing promised to Abraham.
- Law is essentially about works.
  - In fact, the law should always have been pursued by faith (Rom. 9:31-32).

Christ alone explains Abraham and the law (vv. 13-14).

- He bore the curse imposed by law, and redeems believers.
- He secures the blessing anticipated by the promise to Abraham.
- This blessing has come to us by the Spirit, to us who believe (3:2; 4:6).
- To turn Abraham into an icon of law keeping is to misrepresent him.