

Thirty-Five Days in Galatians

Study Two: Days Eight to Fourteen

Galatians 2:11-3:20

Day Eight

11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.

12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

vs. 11-13 – At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and in the private meeting that Paul referenced earlier in this letter, the apostles had endorsed Paul’s outreach to the Gentiles. Yet the social pressure against Gentiles was so powerful that Peter could not walk out this endorsement when Jewish believers were present. Culture and peer pressure are powerful entities. Unless your internal values are well developed, you will tend to be influenced by external pressures. And Peter was no exception.

The implication here is that James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, was supportive of, if not actually part of, the “circumcision party.” This supports what I mentioned in study one: Jerusalem did not care for Paul or his ministry. They endorsed it because it was obviously from the Spirit, but did not support it. The Jewish believers were biased in their approach to non-Jews, and it made their ministry ineffective to all but Jews.

I am sure that Paul felt betrayed and angered by what he termed their “hypocrisy.” In private they said Paul’s ministry was from God, but in public they acted like it was not. Paul got in Peter’s face, so to speak, to challenge him on this issue.

As strange as this may sound, this scenario encourages me. The early church had its share of problems, just like the modern church. This leads me to conclude that problems, disagreements, and misunderstandings are part of serving the Lord, part of our human dilemma. I have been idealistic at times, assuming that tension and disagreement were signs that somehow God’s work was being hindered. But Paul’s work among the Gentiles prospered and grew in spite of Jerusalem’s lukewarm response. And this disagreement caused Paul to write this letter and clarify the correct doctrine for generations to come.

How idealistic are you? Do problems in the church or among believers discourage you or make you feel like backing away or quitting? Be encouraged. Believers who are filled with the Spirit are imperfect people and problems are a way of life, especially if you are

advancing God's work. Don't expect your brothers and sisters to give you a parade for your obedience. Work for the praise from God and not from men.

Day Nine

14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

15 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners'

16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

17 "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!

v. 14 – Paul revealed what he said to Peter. Obviously Peter was not living a perfectly “kosher” lifestyle any more. He was gradually being freed from the legalism of Jewish customs. Yet Peter was willing to impose the bondage he had grown up with (and was now being freed from) on the new Gentile believers. Sometimes the most legalistic person can be someone who is now dealing with a person who has the same problem that the free person once had. For example, a former smoker can be hard on someone who still smokes, forgetting what they went through to get free from their habit.

Remember, Paul was attempting to make a case to the Galatians that the position of the “circumcision party” was dangerous, not to be tolerated in any way, shape or form. Paul was positioning his doctrine of Gentile grace as superior to the limited Jewish mindset.

vs. 15&16 – Paul knew by firsthand experience that the Law could not save anyone. He was saying that the Jews, of all people, should know and teach that following rules and regulations, as holy as they may be, was not the way to salvation.

Here Paul used the word “justified.” There is an rhyming definition of justified that explains its meaning so well: “just as if I'd never sinned.” That is how you and I stand before God when we are justified! Faith justifies us before God and continues to justify us. We cannot justify ourselves; only God can do that. God sets the conditions for our justification and the sole condition is faith!

Thank Paul for arguing and fighting for this critical truth. Because Paul fought to make this truth central to Christianity, you and I are free from following the Law and free to follow Christ by the Spirit. Paul left his mark on his generation. Will we leave our mark on ours?

v. 17 – This is a bit difficult to understand. I believe that this was Paul's point: if this perverse doctrine of following the Law while trying to be justified by faith is attributed to Christ, then Christ is the source of a less-than-perfect approach to God. This can never

be! Anyone who equated salvation with following the Law and then made a case that this was a doctrine of Jesus was still a “sinner.” Christ could not be the author of such an initiative or doctrine.

Day Ten

- 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker.
19 For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.
20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

v. 18 – This is a strong statement. Paul saw that faith in Christ had destroyed the Law as a means to access, serve or worship God. With that established, Paul argued that if the Jews would now rebuild what Christ had destroyed, they would prove themselves to be transgressors or lawbreakers. Paul left no argument untouched in trying to save the Galatians from giving themselves to this perverted doctrine. You must admire Paul’s determination; there was nothing halfhearted about his efforts to protect the churches he had planted.

vs. 19&20 – Paul had died to the Law through the Law so that he could live for God. The Law condemned Paul to die and he was crucified through Christ. But the risen Christ lived in Paul and He now lives in you and me as well. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us! Hallelujah! Verse 20 is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible.

This is why the Law had no power over Paul and has no power over me. I died and the law of the Spirit is my new standard for behavior. While the Law said not to commit adultery, the law of the Spirit says don’t even look at a woman with impure motives. A more exacting Law is now in effect, but Christ living in me through the power of the Spirit helps me to do what I could never do trying to follow the Law of Moses.

We are not alone! Christ lives in us, having given Himself for us out of His great love for us. If this doesn’t make you happy, then you don’t understand what verse 20 is telling you.

v. 21 – The teaching of the circumcision party must have had a great impact in Galatia, for Paul has so far used two chapters to counter its claims. Legalism has plagued the Church for 2,000 years and still we do not pay attention to its dangers. Men have always been looking for a set of rules to follow that would insure they are “doing right” where God is concerned. There is also a desire on the part of many to do something for God in their own power, according to their own interpretation of service to God.

If Paul spent this much time and energy resisting and refuting any system that was “anti-faith,” we should do so as well. There is no way to please God except through faith--

faith in God when you first come to Him, faith every time you come to Him. Are you walking in faith today, or are you following any rules that you hope will earn you God's love and favor?

Day Eleven

- 1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.
- 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?
- 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?
- 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing?
- 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

v. 1 – The word “bewitched” here literally means “to fascinate by false representations.” There are excellent teachers who can build elaborate systems that they claim represent service to God; but they are liars, infatuated with their own intelligence. The true gospel is the good news that Jesus was crucified on our behalf, and it is faith in this historic event and the living Christ that opens the way to God.

vs. 2&3 – Paul made one excellent argument after another to refute the claims of the circumcision party. I think of the verse that states, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” (Proverbs 18:17). I have often not taken the time to examine all sides of an argument or report of the truth and have been guilty of rashly siding with the first interpretation I heard. This has led to wrong conclusions and misunderstandings.

Here he asks the Galatians what they did to merit the Spirit of God when Paul came to them. They received the Spirit by faith and he then urged them not to make faith an event, but a way of life. How about you? Are your faith testimonies recent and full of life, or are your testimonies relics placed under glass in the museum of your mind and heart, reminders of a day gone by when you had faith in God?

v. 4 – The Galatians obviously suffered when they opened their hearts to the gospel of faith, as many did when they put their trust in Christ. The writer of Hebrews wrote:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded (Hebrews 10:32-35).

Isn't it interesting that the Galatians suffered for choosing faith over legalism or the worship of idols? It would seem that suffering is a confirmation of putting your trust in God. Do you agree? Some people get angry when you give up and surrender to God.

v. 5 – This was a straightforward question for the Galatians and for you? As I have stated in past studies, faith is the currency with which we do “business” with God. God fills our pockets with faith, asks us to empty our pockets when we come to Him, and then refills our pockets once our faith is used. Every morning I write this study in faith that God will help me, that He will provide for me as I write. I conduct seminars, write books, counsel people and travel in faith. I have faith that God will watch over my adult children. I can't think of any rules that I follow except the rule of obedience to the initiative of the Spirit.

Day Twelve

- 6 Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
- 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.
- 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."
- 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

v. 6 – Paul went into the camp of the “circumcision party” and used one of their champions, Abraham, to continue making his case for faith. Abraham was the father of Judaism. The Jews later received and then “developed” the Law of Moses into an intricate religious system.

Paul was referring to Abraham's response to God's promise that he would have children and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in heaven. Take a moment and look at that passage and one that further explains that event in Romans.

Read Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:3-25.

v. 7 – What a slap in the face to those who put their trust in their family tree! The Jews thought they were special because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. Paul pulled the rug out from under that claim by stating that the real children of Abraham are those who have faith! If you are reading this and have put your trust in Christ, you are a child of Abraham. The Jew standing at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, who may use bloodlines to trace his physical connection to Abraham, is actually not a true descendent. What a statement! You can understand why Jerusalem and the Jewish believers had their reservations about Paul. You can understand how angry they must have been.

vs. 8&9 – These verses deal a blow to the premise that the presence of natural Jews will be a blessing to the nations where they live. Scripture was not talking about natural Israel, but the Israel of faith. This in itself is a controversial statement, for many have a

romantic relationship with the concept of modern Israel. But Paul was an ethnic Jew who was now a believer and he claimed that faith, not ethnic lineage, is the issue in the sight of God.

Day Thirteen

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."

11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

v. 10 – Some of these statements are taking my breath away! Everyone who relies on rules and regulations to find favor with God is under a curse! For when you choose to follow the rules as opposed to faith in God, you must follow every rule that God instituted.

The Law was good, as Paul pointed out. But the Law was impossible to keep perfectly, which was a requirement for it to bring anyone close to God. As soon as you disobeyed one aspect of the Law, you violated all of it and had to take steps to come back into right relationship with God.

One purpose of the Law was to cause man to see how impossible the Law was to keep so he would welcome a grace system in its place. Instead the Jews accepted the impossible task of keeping the Law and even made it more difficult through additional rules and regulations. The Jews chose the Law and rejected Jesus. Their Law was their God. Thus they were under a curse when they were unable to keep all the Law, which was impossible for sinful man to do.

v. 11 – We are well into chapter three and Paul was still teaching on the same subject: keeping the Law versus having faith. There are many modern legalists who need to read Galatians and appropriate this one simple truth. Some denominations and people help people get saved by grace and faith, then help them live a life of rules and regulations that supposedly help them maintain their standing with God. Are you guilty of this? Do you know others who are?

v. 12 – Everyone chooses the system under which they will function before God. The Jews had chosen the Law and they lived under this austere matrix of regulations that required all their time and energy to keep. Faith has one rule: trust the Lord for

salvation. The rest of the rules are spiritual: They come from the Spirit and are fulfilled in the Spirit.

v. 13 – Jesus was condemned by and through the Law, becoming a curse for us in order to redeem us from the curse that we were under. What love! Jesus was willing to become a curse to remove the curse.

v. 14 – The promise was that in Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed. As mentioned earlier, this was not a promise for any nation who honored Jews, but for any nation or ethnic group who put their faith in God. The blessing of Abraham was the Spirit of God given to those who put their trust in Him, just like Abraham did.

Day Fourteen

15 Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.

20 A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.

v. 15 – I think of something Peter wrote in his epistle:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Paul took great pains to clarify what was at stake in his battle with the circumcision party. It is not always easy to understand and is open to misinterpretation and distortion. That doesn't mean that we can simply ignore these issues because they are too difficult to comprehend. We must ask the Spirit to help guide us into all the truth.

Paul now used another example—that of a human last will and testament. If it has been legally processed, it cannot be set aside for any reason. This is how it was with the promise that was given to Abraham. It could be set aside for any reason.

v. 16 – Paul would have made an excellent lawyer, I think. He pointed out that the promise of blessing was not made to “seeds” (many people) but to a seed, namely Christ and all who are found in Him. So the promise that “all nations will be blessed through you” was made to Abraham and passed on to Christ and the Law could not change this will of God.

vs. 17&18 – The promised blessing to Abraham could not be set aside by the Law, which came 430 years later. God’s promise superseded God’s Law. I am glad I am a son of Abraham, a son of the promise, as opposed to a son of the Law. How about you?

Vs. 19&20 – Christ came in the fullness of time according to God’s plan. The Law was introduced because of God’s righteousness that required a holy people who would serve Him. Israel had to be made conscious of their sinfulness and their need for a Savior, the Son of promise. The Law was a legal system, complete with contracts and a mediator, but the whole system was to show man his inability to serve God since he was a transgressor. Instead there were some who liked the Law and its regulations and who wanted to keep it.

But the promise to Abraham came before the Law and Christ came to fulfill and receive that promise. Paul was making a case that it was absolutely impossible to continue in a system of Law now that faith was the way to God. The Law was not a valid option where faith was concerned; faith was the “only act in town,” when it came to serving God.