

Galatians

Week 4 – Chapter 3



Chapter 3:

Chapters 3 and 4 are the central theme of the whole letter. Paul has been writing an introduction, setting the scene with a few hints as to what the problem is with the Galatians. But now he begins to unwrap the situation that has been caused by some Jewish teachers insisting that circumcision was necessary for Gentile Christians.

VI-2

Paul again expresses his astonishment that the Galatians are even considering another story about the crucifixion of Jesus. He had been quite detailed in his explanation of what Jesus did, this is the story of the gospel.

Paul now introduces the idea of the Spirit to his argument.

This is the first time Paul mentions the Spirit in his letter and he links the Spirit with how the Galatians received the gospel, the story of Jesus. They received the Spirit by hearing the gospel.

Rom 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

Paul introduces Spirit here because the Spirit is the sign that the Christian has their inheritance and a person can only have the inheritance if they are found in the covenant.

Rom 8:23,
2 Cor. 5:5,

The Spirit is the guarantee of the inheritance. “you have already received the Spirit so you are already a part of the family”. You received the inheritance by faith not by works of the law.

V3

If you already have the Spirit, if this is how you started then why would you think you need the Torah to complete the receiving of your inheritance?

V6-9

Paul introduces Abraham into his argument for the first time. Abraham and his life will be important for the rest of this section.

Paul quotes Gen 15 and then Gen. 12.

Abraham's inheritance would be done through the exodus experience. This is what the rest of Genesis chapter 15 describes.

Verse 6 is the verse that Paul quotes in Galatians. "Counted as righteous" only appears in one other place, outside of Gen.15 in the OT, Ps. 106:30.

This story about Phinehas comes from Numbers 25:10-13.

Yahweh rewards Phinehas for his action in keeping Israel 'right' before Yahweh. The reward is a covenant, a perpetual inheritance.

So when God counted Abraham as righteous he was saying that he had a covenant with him, not because of what Abraham had done but because of Abraham's willingness to step into relationship with Yahweh.

Vs 10-12

For Paul 'law' stands for the Torah the first 5 books of the OT, how to live under Yahweh's authority, that is, the whole story of Israel, not just a list of do's and don'ts.

Blessing and curses of Deut 28-30. The ultimate curse is the exile of the people from their land. This is of course what happened.

For Paul and his fellow Jews the exile was still a reality. While they lived in the land they were still under a foreign power, there was no King of David's line on the throne and the most important part of the Temple, the Arc of the Covenant, no longer existed.

The Messiah means that exile is now over.

V13-14

Jesus Messiah takes the curse, ultimate exile on himself, and in doing so makes a way for exile to finally be over and for the Gentile to begin to join the family promised to Abraham.

V15-18

The Torah did not come into being until well after the covenant is established with Abraham.

V16 - the word for offspring is sperma and can be translated 'family'. This is a singular collective noun. So Paul says there is but 1 family

not many families. That one family is the family which began with Abraham.

In the others, as in the original and other Semitic languages, the terms of the group are used metaphorically at a higher level for more or less fundamental, mostly positive and occasionally negative statements about the forms of organic life, e.g., those ref. to family and national life, such as the “seed of Abraham” (Is. 41:8), the “seed of Jacob” (Is. 45:19) and the like.¹

This family has now become the Messiah, which is used as a collective term, we are in the Messiah, or in the Messiah’s family, an idea Paul uses frequently.

V19-22

Having introduced the Torah, Paul makes the point that the reason God gave Torah was to keep the Jews safe from the practices of the nations around them. Again the idea of ‘light of the world’

The law, then, was a judging instrument for the people of God; through its written code they learned that certain behavior was contrary to God’s will.²

What about verse 20. If we read Rom 3:29-30 and remember that offspring is family then Paul is just emphasizing that God has only 1 family, there is not a god for the Jews and a god for the Gentiles. Paul uses the most fundamental of Jewish beliefs; God is one, to make his point.

V23-29

The law is like a babysitter, to keep hold of the Jews to protect them until the Messiah came to fulfill the promises.

Now that the Messiah is here there is no need of the Torah as babysitter.

Verse 29 goes back to the beginning of the chapter; your receipt of the Spirit shows that you are an heir of Abraham.

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 538.

² Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 179.

Put together, Paul argues that the Judaizers are wrong (and those Galatian Christians who follow them) because they do not understand why God gave the law. They do not know that it was designed to turn Israel's bad behaviors into transgressions of God's law. Nor do they know that it was given for only a short period; we might talk here about the "parenthesis of the law." Consequently, they do not know that everything for salvation and acceptance with God is established in Abraham. Consequently, they do not know that imposing the law after Christ has come is a gross stepping back in God's plan of redemption to a previous era. It is B.C. lifestyle in an A.D. period.³

Then comes the great conclusion to the whole chapter. Paul's point is precisely that God promised Abraham a single family, and that, in the Messiah, God has at last created just that. 'If you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham's family.' Why look anywhere else? Why try to become a child of Abraham by any other means? But, if you are part of Abraham's family, you stand to inherit under the terms of God's original covenanted will (3:15–18).⁴

³ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 184–185.

⁴ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 42.