

Galatians 3A

- There is a short ditty that helps us remember the purpose of each part of the Bible
 - This memory aid helps us recognize the purpose in each major section of the Bible
 - The Old Testament is Christ promised
 - The Gospels are Christ revealed
 - The book of Acts is Christ preached
 - The letters are Christ explained
 - The book of Revelation is Christ anticipated
 - The epistles were given so that we might fully appreciate the meaning and significance of Christ's work of redemption
 - Naturally, that means when we turn to the letters of the New Testament, we're going to find doctrine
 - In fact, virtually all the doctrines of our faith comes out of the letters of the New Testament
 - Knowing that, we must give priority to understanding and appreciating doctrine
 - Doctrine is an examination of spiritual truth
 - And understanding doctrine requires thinking soberly and deeply
 - We come to a study of doctrine to learn why the Lord has done what He has done
 - We're learning the truth about sin, about holiness, about man and about God
 - And to appreciate what is yet to happen
- Ultimately, we learn doctrine for much the same reason that we were taught chemistry or biology in school

- We learned those subjects so that we could make sense of the way things are
 - I didn't need to understand biology or chemistry to appreciate and enjoy nature
 - But as I learned more about those subjects, I could better appreciate what I saw by understanding it at a deeper level
- Furthermore, through my knowledge I could live and work in greater harmony than was possible without that knowledge
 - By learning about elements and the reactions of certain chemicals, I could avoid tragic accidents
 - By learning how the body works I could make better choices for my health and wellbeing
- Similarly, I don't have to study doctrine to know God and enjoy Him
 - I am saved by my faith before I know even the first thing of doctrine
 - But if I take time to study doctrine in Scripture, I gain the benefits of that learning
 - I can enjoy God even more fully through a better understanding
 - I can learn how to please Him better, how to avoid potentially dangerous choices and decisions and I can resist false teaching better
 - So studying doctrine is absolutely essential to proper spiritual development as a Christian
- Chapter 3 of Galatians is 100%, full strength Christian doctrine
 - Paul is teaching (he might say re-teaching) the churches in Galatia on the core doctrines of the faith
 - The doctrines Paul touches upon in the next three chapters are:
 - Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation
 - Israelology, the doctrine of Israel
 - Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church
 - He addresses these doctrines in a chiastic structure

- A chiasm is a literary structure in which a series of points are developed in a certain order
- The order of the thoughts proceed to a point, then the order is reversed and the thought completed in opposite order
- So if an argument has three points, a chiastic procession of those points would be 1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1
- In Chapters 3-5, Paul address the doctrines of soteriology, Israelology and ecclesiology in a chiastic order, loosely speaking
 - He begins with a discussion of soteriology
 - Then he proceeds to a proper view of Israel and the Law
 - Lastly he shows the meaning for the church
 - Finally, he'll look at all three again in reverse order

Gal. 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

Gal. 3:2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Gal. 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Gal. 3:4 Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?

Gal. 3:5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

- Paul opens with five rhetorical questions that set up his teaching
 - Each question has an obvious answer
 - And those answers drive the reader to natural conclusions that counter the false teaching of the Judaizers
 - There is no way to answer these questions honestly without contradicting the tenets of the false teachers
 - First Paul asks who bewitched you, oh foolish Galatians?
 - The world foolish can also be translated stupid
 - This is a hard word in scripture, equivalent to an insult
 - How is it that Paul can say this without sinning?

- In short, Paul is speaking honestly with regard to their thinking on this matter
- They are acting foolish, like a person who has never learned basic things
- Paul asks are you acting this way because someone bewitched you?
 - The Greek word for bewitched only appears here in the New Testament
 - It means to be placed under a spell
 - So in effect, Paul is saying “Are you acting so stupidly because someone cast a spell upon you?”
- His point is that this is the only way he can imagine they would have come to their present state of confusion concerning Christ and the Gospel
 - Because they were taught properly before Paul left town
 - He says at the end of v.1 that Jesus Christ was portrayed as crucified before their eyes
 - I don’t particularly like this English translation of the original text
 - The Greek words literally say “before your eyes Jesus Christ was described from before all time as crucified”
 - Paul is reminding the church that their own eyes saw the truth of Jesus written in scripture declaring He was the Messiah Who died for sins
 - These new believers had received proper instruction from scripture
 - They saw for themselves the basis of their salvation, which is Jesus crucified as scripture testifies
- Then Paul asks the second question: how did they receive the Spirit?
 - Was the arrival of the Spirit in their hearts a matter of Law or faith?
 - Clearly, the answer is obvious again
 - As they heard the Gospel message Paul preached, that message was united with faith in their hearts
 - And at the moment of faith, they received the Holy Spirit

- The Spirit didn't come as a result of keeping the Law of Moses
 - Clearly, the church in Galatia hadn't been living under the Law of Moses
 - More than likely, they had no knowledge of the Law whatsoever
 - So obviously, the Spirit's arrival in their hearts had nothing to do with following the Law of Moses
- Why is Paul focused on the arrival of the Spirit?
 - Because the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the moment of salvation
 - In Romans, Paul says that the definition of a Christian is one who has the Holy Spirit

[Rom. 8:14](#) For all who are being led by the **Spirit** of God, these are sons of God.

- So Paul is asking the Galatians, how did you receive eternal life? By faith or by works of Law?
 - And the answer is by faith
- Then Paul asks his third question, which is itself predicated on the answer to the second question
 - Paul asks if this church is so foolish (stupid) that they now believe they can be perfected by Law having been saved by faith
 - Obviously, Paul is assuming they knew the right answer to the earlier question
 - The church received the Spirit by faith, that is they were saved by their faith and not by works of Law
 - So then Paul asks why they are switching horses in midstream?
 - If faith was sufficient by itself to bring them to Christ, then why would they foolishly believe that returning to life under the Law was necessary to perfect them?
 - The word for perfect is *epiteleo*, which means to bring something to completion
 - God began the work of salvation in them by faith

- So Paul asks if the origin of their salvation is by faith, why do they feel the need to bring it to completion through works?
- Our sanctification – our being made holy – was begun by the Spirit and will be finished by the Spirit
- God brings it to completion on the basis of our faith in His promises

Phil. 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began** a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- Paul's fourth question directs their attention to what they experienced as believers
 - The churches in Galatia saw immediate and intense persecution as a result of their conversion to Christianity
 - In Acts 14 we have the record of Barnabas and Paul preaching in Galatia
 - As they prepare to leave and go home to Antioch, we read:

Acts 14:21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, **Acts 14:22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

- Paul was encouraging the disciples to withstand the tribulations they were experiencing
- He reassured them that suffering was a natural consequence of faith – it was a privilege to suffer for Christ
- So now Paul asks what did your suffering mean if you were not actually saved at the time?
 - Remember, the Judaizers were teaching that the churches in Galatia were not actually believers because they hadn't yet been circumcised or followed the Law
 - So if this teaching was to be believed, Paul asks why were being persecuted? Was it in vain, for no benefit?
 - If persecution is the mark of the believer, then how do they explain the enemy attacking them?

- A house divided against itself cannot stand
- Finally, Paul's last question is a summation of all the issues Paul has raised so far
 - When we see God's work in this church, the giving of the Spirit and the working of miracles, how do we explain it?
 - Did God accomplish these works because the church was working under the Law?
 - Or did He respond to the faith of the church at the proclamation of His word?
 - The answer to this question is as obvious as the earlier questions, so let's review them all
 - Who cast a spell on the Galatians to lead them away from the testimony of Jesus crucified in agreement with the scriptures?
 - The Judaizers
 - How did the church receive the Spirit, receive salvation and become children of God?
 - By faith having heard the Gospel preached by Paul
 - If their sanctification began in faith by the Spirit, then how should they expect the rest of their walk with the Lord to proceed?
 - In faith by the Spirit
 - Did they experience persecution for Christ in vain, as if they hadn't yet been saved without circumcision?
 - No, they rightly suffered having believed
 - Has God chosen to demonstrate His desire to work in your life through faith or through works?
 - He has manifested Himself through faith
- These questions and their unavoidable answers deal a devastating blow to the Judaizers' arguments
 - Those false teachers called for works of Law to assure salvation, but Paul proves their arguments can't hold water

- And now he moves forward to make his argument against the Judaizers
- First, Paul sets straight the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith
- Next, he'll look at the doctrine of Israel, which includes the purpose of the Law
- Then finally, he will address the proper understanding of the Church in God's economy

Gal. 3:6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Gal. 3:7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

- Paul opens his teaching on salvation with "even so" which means just as, or according to
 - This is a transition intended to alert the reader that Paul is launching into teaching mode
 - He reminds the church that from the beginning God worked through faith to bring righteousness
 - Even before the Law was given, before even circumcision was commanded, the Lord declared Abraham righteous
 - Abraham believed a word of promise God spoke
 - And as a result of that faith, God declared Abraham righteous
 - When God declares anything, it becomes true in the moment it's spoken
 - It may require many years before the truth of it comes to pass for men, but it is no less real and true even as we wait
 - God is not constrained by time
 - Which is why Jesus says the heavens and earth may pass away, but God's word will never pass away
 - The word of God is as eternal as God Himself
 - So if Abraham was declared righteous in this moment in Genesis 15, then righteousness simply cannot be a matter of law or circumcision

- For we know that God is perfectly just
 - Therefore, if one man can be declared righteous without those things, then they are unnecessary for any man
 - So Paul concludes in v.6 that those who are of faith are sons of Abraham
- In these verses Paul raises the next major area of doctrine he wants to address, that is an issue of Israeology
 - Abraham is the father of the nation of Israel
 - He received a promise from God and a covenant
 - That promise and covenant eventually brought the nation of Israel into existence
 - And from that nation came the word of God and the Messiah
 - But the Judaizers had taken Abraham's importance and distorted it
 - They claimed that only those who were Abraham's children would be included in the promises of God
 - Galatians couldn't be blessed, or receive an inheritance or enter the kingdom unless they were part of the family that received those promises – that is to become Jewish
 - So now Paul moves to discuss Abraham's importance and the connection between Abraham and the Gentile believer
 - Those who are of faith, that is those who have received the promises of God in Christ Jesus, are counted as Abraham's sons
 - But in what sense are we Abraham's sons (and daughters)?
 - There are two mistakes we could make doctrinally in interpreting Paul's statement here
 - On the one hand we could assume that Paul means we must in some sense literally become Jewish
 - This was the conclusion the Judaizers had reached
 - On the other hand, we might go in the other direction and claim that belief erases all distinction between Israel and Gentiles

- This is the mistake of the modern replacement theology movement
 - Paul will eventually come back to settling this question in the letter
 - But first, he uses the next section to give a proper perspective on the Jewish nation, the law and the promises spoken to Abraham

Gal. 3:8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

Gal. 3:9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

- Paul says that God always intended to bring salvation to Gentiles in due time
 - And since God intended to save Gentiles, who do not have the Law, he devised a means that did not depend on Law
 - He preached to Abraham that through him all nations will be blessed
 - The word for nations in Hebrew is *goy*, which simply means Gentiles
 - So before the Jewish nation had even been birthed, the Lord declares that salvation would be made available to Gentiles through Abraham's family
 - So how was a Gentile to be blessed with salvation through Abraham's descendants if Gentiles didn't descend from the man Abraham?
 - Paul says Gentiles join that blessing by faith
 - By faith we are called Abraham's sons
 - In Jewish thinking, the word "sons" can carry the sense of follower
 - Just as the sons of God are followers of God
 - So the sons of Abraham are the followers of Abraham
 - As Jesus demonstrated to the Pharisees

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

- The Pharisees called themselves the sons of Abraham
 - But Jesus pointed out that if they are to be called sons of Abraham, then they should be following Abraham's example
 - So the Gentile becomes the son or daughter of the Lord in faith, because by that faith we become His follower
 - Paul will return to discussing this issue of Jewish and Gentile children
- Meanwhile, Paul continues to develop the doctrine of Israel by turning to the purpose of the Law

Gal. 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."

Gal. 3:11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Gal. 3:12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

- The Judaizers had made following the Law of Moses the centerpiece of their argument
 - They taught that believers, whether Jew or Gentile, must live according to the Law to be saved
 - But here Paul says that all who rely on the Law for their justification are under a curse
 - The Law itself declares in Deuteronomy 21:23 that all who do not abide by all things written in the Law are cursed to hang on a tree (that is to die)
 - James echoes this truth when he teaches

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

- God's law functions as an indivisible unit
 - Keeping some of the law while failing to keep others gains us nothing, since God's Law is an all-or-nothing standard

- Scripture defines righteousness as a point, not a scale
- We see this clearly in an exchange between Jesus and a rich young ruler

Luke 18:19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except **God alone**.

- Only God is good, Jesus says
- Men prefer to think that good is a scale of degrees, but we have the wrong measuring stick
 - Being good means being 100% sinless
 - Even one sin makes us 100% bad by God's standard
 - This is why scriptures say that the one wishing to live according to Law must keep all of it or else be cursed by the penalties of the Law
 - The penalty for failing to keep the Law, according to the Law itself, was death
 - Only those who keep everything written in the Law from birth could escape that penalty
- On the other hand, scripture has always declared that righteousness was obtainable only by faith
 - Abraham was our example of a man declared righteous by faith, and the prophets made similar declarations
 - Habakkuk 2:4 declares that the righteous man shall live by faith
 - The prophet teaches

Hab. 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.

- Faith in God's promises is and always has been the one and only way to righteousness, which is the requirement to enter God's presence
- So in v.12, Paul concludes that faith and law are always two mutually exclusive means of seeking righteousness

- In other words, there are only two options for reaching Heaven, and one is no option at all
- We can either earn entrance on our own merits living up to the standards of the Law, which is to be equal to God's goodness
 - Which Jesus Himself said is impossible
 - Or we can rely entirely on faith in Jesus Christ
- Paul says it's impossible to seek righteousness by Law and by faith at the same time
 - They are mutually exclusive paths
 - Either I trust in my own ability to meet some standard of performance and demonstrate my righteousness by my actions
 - Or I recognize I can't meet God's standard, and so I trust in God's promises instead of on my own abilities
 - I rely exclusively on His mercy trusting in His provision of Christ
 - To summarize, Paul repeats that he who practices the Law shall live by them
 - Another way to state this principle is to say those who place their trust for salvation in works of Law must be prepared to accept the result
 - They must be prepared to live with what follows
 - And since every man has sin, and breaking even one law leaves us short of righteousness required for Heaven, then following the Law leaves us empty handed
 - Even our choice to follow law for justification is proof in itself that we are not resting in faith in God's promises
 - The Bible teaches that we cannot receive God's promises in faith until we have first repented of dead works
 - So those who seek to be justified by works of Law are giving evidence they have not received Christ in faith
- Because the Law is no solution to the problem of sin, Paul turns back to Christ as our solution

[Gal. 3:13](#) Christ 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” –
[Gal. 3:14](#) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

- Here we have the entire Gospel message and the central point of the Bible
 - Christ redeemed sinful men from the curse
 - The word redeemed means to pay a ransom, to free someone by means of a payment
 - Jesus purchased or ransomed us from the curse of the Law
 - By hanging on the cross, a tree of sorts, Jesus died in our place
 - So with the penalty of the Law satisfied, we have the opportunity to be saved by faith rather than works
 - Everyone who stands in God’s presence must possess a righteousness equal to God’s own goodness
 - The Law of God is the standard we must meet
 - But working to keep that Law is a fruitless path
 - So if we can’t fulfill it, our only hope is that someone else fulfill it on our behalf
 - Paul says Jesus died to give us that way
 - He makes possible the blessing given to Abraham and also to the Gentiles
 - Those who rest in God’s promises by faith are blessed
 - In contrast to those who rest in works and are cursed by their sin
- It seems so clear that faith trumps works of Law, especially given the futility of working to earn perfection
 - So why did the churches in Galatia agree with the Judaizers? What argument did they make to convince the church to keep the Law?
 - In short, it was historical sequence
 - The Judaizers had argued that since the giving of the Law to Moses came later in God’s plan, it took precedence

- It took priority over the early revelation to Abraham
- So while faith was good enough for Abraham, once the Law came to Israel at Sinai, it superseded the earlier revelation
- This analysis was wrong and completely misunderstood the purpose in the giving of the Law
 - And if Paul is going to defend salvation by grace through faith alone, then he needs to teach the proper perspective of the Law
 - He is going to teach more doctrine, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church, and use examples from human experience to show the proper relationship between God's promises and the law

Gal. 3:15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

- Paul's argument begins with a human example of covenants
 - A covenant is a special form of relationship, one we don't see today outside of marriage
 - It is a legally binding agreement similar to contracts
 - Covenants had terms and obligations like a contract
 - But covenants always differed in important aspects as well, and Paul points those out here
 - First, Paul says that once a covenant is ratified, no one sets it aside
 - Paul's referring to a covenant's most enduring quality...it endures
 - A covenant is legally binding for life
 - There is no "cancel" button on a covenant
 - To break a covenant meant paying with your life
 - So it was said that only by death does a covenant come to an end
 - This is why Jesus says to divorce and remarry is always adultery

- A marriage is a type of covenant before God, and therefore is an agreement that only comes to an end when a death occurs
 - Secondly, Paul says no new conditions can be added to it
 - It's not a living agreement, like the US Constitution
 - It is formed in a moment, according to certain terms, and thereafter it remains unchanged
 - So every covenant must continue until its terms come to pass
- Now these limitations are true even for a regular, everyday human covenant, Paul says
 - So why should we expect a covenant set by the Lord to be any less certain and unchangeable?
 - Will not God honor His covenants at least as well as men honor their covenants?
 - Certainly, that's the conclusion we should make, and that's the application Paul begins to make starting in the next verse

[Gal. 3:16](#) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

- The promises Paul mentions are those made in the Abrahamic covenant
 - The terms of that promise were given to Abraham personally and his seed
 - Paul is referring specifically to the moment in Genesis 22 when God spoke to Abraham

[Gen. 22:16](#) and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,
[Gen. 22:17](#) indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

[Gen. 22:18](#) "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

- When the Lord spoke these words to Abraham, He used the singular form of the word seed in Hebrew (*zera*)

- If God had simply meant that Abraham and his offspring were to receive these things, then God would have used the plural form of the word seed
 - But Paul says God purposely used the the singular form of seed because He had a certain person in mind, that is Christ
 - These promises had Christ's arrival in mind, because Christ was the One to fulfill these promises
- Now earlier, the Lord had spoken to Abraham about this same covenant and said Abraham's descendants would receive the blessings
 - In those earlier presentations, God used a plural word for descendants
 - So the promises do extend to Abraham's family in the sense of believing Jews
 - But in Chapter 22, God changed His language to use a singular version of seed to show His promises revolve around Jesus' arrival
 - This was Paul's point
- The covenant given to Abraham was given by a promise, and that promise was spoken to Abraham and to Christ
 - Until both Abraham and Christ receive what God has promised in the covenant, then the covenant cannot be set aside or changed

Psa. 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Psa. 110:2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

Psa. 110:3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;

In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,

Your youth are to You as the dew.

Psa. 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

- Until Christ is given all that the Lord promised for Abraham and his Seed, the covenant will remain in force

- So then Paul makes the application

Gal. 3:17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Gal. 3:18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

- The Law of Moses arrived 430 years after the Lord spoke the promises of the covenant to Abraham
 - This later arrival of the Law was the reason Judaizers claimed that the Law was a requirement for the believer
 - Their logic was the Law must be a requirement if the Lord added it after the promises spoken to Abraham
 - But Paul argues such a conclusion is impossible given the nature of covenants
- Nothing that comes after an existing covenant can invalidate a covenant already in effect
 - Therefore, nothing can nullify the promises God made to Abraham
 - Abraham and Christ were going to receive the things God promised
 - And those promises were no less sure because of the Law's arrival
- In v.18 Paul brings the argument to a close
 - We remember that our salvation, which includes our inheritance, comes either by works of Law or by the means of God's promise
 - But as we established earlier, these two things cannot both be true at the same time
 - Righteousness and the inheritance we receive in the Kingdom cannot be by both a promise and by works
 - Either I give you something and it is a gift, or you obtain it by earning it for yourself
 - Something cannot both be earned and be a gift

- So in v.19 Paul says if we gain our salvation and with it our inheritance by keeping the Law, then we cannot also say we gain it as a gift from God
 - We must say that the Law replaces the promises of God
 - But as Paul demonstrated, our inheritance in the Kingdom was made available to Abraham and all who follow him by faith alone
- So which will it be? Working the Law or receiving a promise?
 - While the issue may be settled in our hearts, and I hope it is, still Paul knew this church needed to hear more
 - Maybe you have the same question the church did in Paul's day
 - That question is why the Law then?
 - If salvation didn't depend on the Law, why was it given to Israel?
 - As Paul continued to teach Israelology and moves into Ecclesiology, we'll get our answer next time