

**Riverview Baptist Church**  
**Sunday School Teaching Plan**  
**November 1, 2015**  
**Galatians 3:1-14**  
**“Receiving the Promised Blessing!”**

**Memory Verse:**

Galatians 3:14, 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.

**The Big Idea:**

Sermon Scripture: The sermon will be the eight in a series of expository sermons on Galatians.

Sunday School Scripture: Galatians 3:1-14

Sunday School Title: “Receiving the Promised Blessing!”

ESS: Christians receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham!

**Preparation:**

Read through this passage at least twice, slowly. Read from two different Bible translations.

<sup>1</sup>You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? <sup>4</sup>Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? <sup>5</sup>So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? <sup>6</sup>So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

<sup>7</sup>Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.<sup>8</sup>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.”<sup>9</sup>So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” <sup>11</sup>Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.”<sup>13</sup>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 pole.” <sup>14</sup>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.

**Presentation**

**Engage:** Give an example about the literal dangers of blurred vision. Ask for responses from the class about what can happen when you can’t see well. Turn to the metaphor that is used in the text that in some way Christians had lost their bearing. They stopped seeing the gospel clearly and had been deceived into legalism. This can happen to us as well and it is very dangerous.

Last week we learned that healing the damage of hypocrisy and establishing unity within the church requires a return to a faith in Jesus Christ that is expressed as “being crucified” with him and “him living” in us!

This week we will learn that we are now living as recipients of the promise God made to Abraham and the evidence of that is the Holy Spirit working in our lives!

## 1. Christians live and work through the indwelling Holy Spirit of God! Verses 1-5

Guzik, "How are we made right before God? What is our standing before Him? Because of some bad teaching, they answered those questions wrong. They thought, "We are made right before God based on what Jesus did for us, *plus* what we do for Him under the Law of Moses." In correcting this, Paul first wrote about his own experiences - first, when he came to Jesus by faith alone, not faith plus being under the law. Then he wrote about his experience of confronting the apostle Peter when he slipped up under this same error. Now, after dealing with *his* experience, the Apostle Paul deals with the experience of the Galatian Christians themselves. Just as Paul's experience proved that we stand right before God based on what Jesus did, not based on what do under the law, so will the Galatians' experience prove the same thing."

Someone has "charmed" them into loosing focus! Contrast the clear portrayal of Jesus crucified, with the loss of focus and becoming bewitched. In the last chapter Paul had powerfully reminded of the death of Jesus by which he had loved them and gave himself for them.

### **What causes us to lose our focus on Jesus today?**

"It is wonderful to have a soft, tender heart before God. But some people have softer *heads* than hearts. Their minds are too accommodating to wrong, unbiblical ideas, and they don't think things through to see if they really are true or not according to the Bible. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity, even as a baby will stick *anything* into its mouth."

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

### **Spiritual growth will be granted in the same manner that we received the promise in the beginning!**

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Holy Spirit through the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Obviously, the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through simple faith. The Holy Spirit is not a "prize" earned through the works of the law.

Some people think that we need to work for the gift of the Holy Spirit, or earn this gift from God.

The Galatians were deceived into thinking that spiritual growth or maturity could be achieved through the works of the flesh, instead of a continued simple faith and abiding in Jesus.

This lays out one of the fundamental differences between the principle of *law* and the principle of *grace*. Under law, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *earning and deserving*. Under grace, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *believing and receiving*. God deals with you under the covenant of *grace*; are you trying to deal with Him on the principle of *law*? Do you believe God wants to bless you? Which is it: by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

### **This is indeed foolishness, it is like going back to the beginning.**

This deception is cultivated by Satan to set our Christian life off-track. If he cannot stop us from being *saved* by faith, then he will attempt to hinder our *blessing and growth and maturity* by faith.

Guzik, "A better translation of the phrase **have you suffered so many things in vain** may be "Have you had such wonderful spiritual experiences, all to no purpose?" This may fit the context better. Paul wonders if all the gifts of the Spirit they had received would amount to no lasting value because now they try to walk by law, not by faith."

**Why is it tempting to depend upon our works of the Law instead of operating out of faith in our spiritual walk?**

## 2. Christians are recipients of the blessing of God (the Holy Spirit) which makes us "Children of Abraham" by faith in Jesus! Verses 6-9

**How did God operate in the life of Abraham?** Read Genesis 15:6 and 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

Present some information about Abraham or lead in a discussion of these verses reference.

A. Scripture tells of God's plan to bless the nations (Gentiles) through Abraham!

The faith of the fathers was directed at the Christ who was to come, while ours rests in the Christ who has come." (Luther)

It is vital to recognize that the Gentiles not only did not have to be born as a Jew to inherit the promise to Abraham, they never have to become a Jew to continue in the promise! They were to walk in the promise in the same manner as they received it, by faith. This is not a new plan, it always had been God's plan.

B. Abraham's spiritual life is a model for justification by faith!

**What does it mean to "believe God"?** Read James 2:19 Discuss the difference between knowledge of the mind and an experiential knowledge.

Abraham's experience shows that God *accounts* us as righteous, because of what Jesus did for us, as we receive what He did for us by faith.

**accounted:** "It has a meaning like 'reckon, calculate', and may be used of placing something to someone's account, here of placing righteousness to Abraham's account."

There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we *accomplish* by our own efforts, and righteousness *accounted* to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did:

C. Abraham's children are all those who have faith in Jesus, not just the Jews by blood!

D. All of Abraham's children by faith receive the blessing (the Holy Spirit)!

**In light of these truths, what is it unnecessary for Gentiles to become Law keeping Jews?**

**What implications does this have on Christian legalism toward Christians?**

If Gentiles don't have to keep Jewish ceremonial Law, then there is no way that one brand of Christian or a single Christian should be trying to persuade other Christians to legalistically copy or follow their pattern of life in areas of style or preference!

## 3. Christians have a changed relationship with the Law because of Jesus' ministry through the cross! Verses 10-14

A. The Law brings a curse to all who are under it!

- B. No one under this curse is justified through their Law keeping!
- C. Jesus became a curse for us to redeem us from the Law's curse on us!
- D. Why? He redeemed us for two reasons!
  - a. The blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus
  - b. So that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The life of the blessing is not found in returning to the Law. The life of blessing that was received by faith in Jesus is lived by faith in Jesus. The power of the promised Holy Spirit is working out of our lives. Remember that we have died and Christ now lives in us! Christ is alive in us, not Law! Let us live by faith in the Son of God!

### Discussion:

What things has Jesus done in your life through His Holy Spirit that you would have never done based solely on keeping the Law? How has the Holy Spirit taken you farther than Law ever did?

### Apply:

- Thank God for giving you the blessing of Abraham though faith in Jesus!
- If you are not a believer, Repent from your life of sin and turn by faith to Jesus today and receive his promises!
- Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you any unclean way! Ask Him to show you legalism that may have taken hold! Repent of any known sin!



The following is an excerpt from Guzik, David. "Study Guide for Galatians 3." Enduring Word. Blue Letter Bible. 7 Jul, 2006. 2015. 6 Nov 2015.

[http://www.blbclassic.org/commentaries/comm\\_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=20172&commInfo=31&topic=Galatians](http://www.blbclassic.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=20172&commInfo=31&topic=Galatians)

### ***The Christian, Law, and Living by Faith***

A. The principle of continuing in faith.

1. (1) Paul confronts their blurred vision of Jesus and His work for them.

**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?**

a. The Galatians struggled with a basic question: How are we made right before God? What is our standing before Him? Because of some bad teaching, they answered those questions wrong. They thought, "We are made right before God based on what Jesus did for us, *plus* what we do for Him under the Law of Moses." In correcting this, Paul first wrote about his own experiences - first, when he came to Jesus by faith alone, not faith plus being under the law. Then he wrote about his experience of confronting the apostle Peter when he slipped up under this same error. Now, after dealing with *his* experience, the Apostle Paul deals with the experience of the Galatian Christians themselves. Just as Paul's experience proved that we stand right before God based on what Jesus did, not based on what do under the law, so will the Galatians' experience prove the same thing.

b. **O foolish Galatians!** The strong words are well deserved. Phillips even translates this, *O you dear idiots of Galatia*. In calling the Galatians **foolish**, Paul is not saying they are morally or mentally deficient (the Greek word *moros* conveys that idea, and was used by Jesus in parables, such as in [Matthew 7:26;25:1-13](#)). Instead, Paul uses the Greek word *anoetos*, which has the idea of someone who *can* think but *fails* to use their power of perception.

i. The principles Paul referred to are things the Galatians knew, things they had been taught. The knowledge and understanding were there, but they were not using them.

c. **Who has bewitched you: Bewitched** has the idea that the Galatians are under some type of spell. Paul doesn't mean this literally, but their thinking is so clouded - and so unbiblical - that it seems that some kind of spell has been cast over them.

i. Barclay translates **bewitched** as *put the evil eye on*. The ancient Greeks were accustomed to and afraid of the idea that a spell could be cast upon them by an "evil eye."

ii. The "evil eye" was thought to work in the way a serpent could hypnotize its prey with its eyes. Once the victim looked into the "evil eye," a spell could be cast. Therefore, the way to overcome the evil eye was simply not to look at it. In using this phrasing, and using the word picture of **bewitched**, Paul is encouraging the Galatians to keep their eyes always, steadfastly, upon Jesus.

iii. How easily the church can be **bewitched** today! Through the centuries, error after error arises, and we are well able to see some of the errors of the past, but many are blind to the errors of today. We are amazed right along with the apostle Paul: **Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?** Even great men of God battle with this. "Although I am a doctor of divinity, and have preached Christ and fought His battles for a long time, I know from personal experience how difficult it is to hold fast to the truth. I cannot always shake off Satan. I cannot always apprehend Christ as the Scriptures portray Him. Sometimes the devil distorts Christ to my vision. But thanks be to God, who keeps us in His Word, in faith, and in prayer." (Luther)

iv. It is wonderful to have a soft, tender heart before God. But some people have softer *heads* than hearts. Their minds are too accommodating to wrong, unbiblical ideas, and they don't think things through to see if they really are true or not according to the Bible. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity, even as a baby will stick *anything* into its mouth.

v. "We often court the coming of the evil influence, and are willing to be fascinated and to turn our backs upon Jesus. Mysterious it is, for why should men castaway diamonds for paste? Mysterious it is, for we do not usually drop the substance to get the shadow. Mysterious it is, for man does not ordinarily empty his pockets of gold in order to fill them with gravel. Mysterious it is, for a thirsty man will not usually turn away from the full, bubbling, living fountain, to see if he can find any drops still remaining, green with scum, stagnant and odorous, at the bottom of some broken cistern. But all these follies are sanity as compared with the folly of which we are guilty, times without number, when, having known the sweetness of Jesus Christ, we turn away to the fascinations of the world." (Maclaren)

d. **Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified:** The idea behind **clearly portrayed** is something like "billboarded," to publicly display as in setting on a billboard. Paul wonders how the Galatians could have missed the message, because he certainly made it clear enough to them.

i. Their vision of Jesus Christ and Him crucified has become cloudy. They no longer see Him and His work on the cross as the center of their Christian lives, now it is Jesus *plus* what they must do for Him.

ii. When they left the message of Jesus and Him crucified, they left the message Paul preached. Paul's preaching was like setting up posters of Jesus all over town - if you saw anything, you saw Jesus.

iii. "Let those who want to discharge the ministry of the Gospel aright learn not only to speak and declaim but also to penetrate into consciences, so that men may see Christ crucified and that His blood may flow. When the Church

has such painters as these she no longer needs wood and stone, that is, dead images, she no longer requires any pictures." (Calvin)

iv. When we see Jesus clearly before us, we won't be deceived. " If anything contrary to this comes before him, he does not timidly say, 'Everybody has a right to his opinion'; but he says, 'Yes, they may have a right to their opinion, and so have I to mine; and my opinion is that any opinion which takes away from the glory of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice is a detestable opinion.' Get the real atonement of Christ thoroughly into your soul, and you will not be bewitched." (Spurgeon)

e. **Before whose eyes:** Paul doesn't mean that they literally saw the crucifixion of Jesus, or even that they had a spiritual vision of it. He means that the truth of Jesus and Him crucified and the greatness of His work for them was clearly laid out for them, so clearly that they could see it. Actually watching the death of Jesus on the cross might mean nothing. Hundreds, if not thousands, saw Jesus dying on the cross, and most of them only mocked Him.

2. (2-3) Paul confronts their departure from the principle of faith.

**This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**

a. **This only I want to learn from you:** "Just tell me this," Paul says. **Did you receive the Holy Spirit through the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Obviously, the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through simple faith. The Holy Spirit is not a "prize" earned through the **works of the law**.

i. Can you imagine? A Gentile is told he must come under the Law of Moses, or God will not bless him. This means he must be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. So he goes in for the operation, and as soon as the cut is made, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon him! Is this how it works? Of course not! We receive the Holy Spirit by *faith*, not by coming under the works of the law.

ii. Some people think that we need to work for the gift of the Holy Spirit, or earn this gift from God. But Jesus made it plain that all we have to do is ask: *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*(Luke 11:9-13)

b. **Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?** The Galatians were deceived into thinking that spiritual growth or maturity could be achieved through the works of the flesh, instead of a continued simple faith and abiding in Jesus.

i. "You received the greatest gift - the Holy Spirit of God - by faith. Are you going on from there, not by faith, but by trusting in your own obedience under the Law of Moses?"

ii. This lays out one of the fundamental differences between the principle of *law* and the principle of *grace*. Under law, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *earning and deserving*. Under grace, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *believing and receiving*. God deals with you under the covenant of *grace*; are you trying to deal with Him on the principle of *law*? Do you believe God wants to bless you? Which is it: **by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**

c. **Are you so foolish?** This is indeed foolishness. This deception is cultivated by Satan to set our Christian life off-track. If he cannot stop us from being *saved* by faith, then he will attempt to hinder our *blessing and growth and maturity* by faith.

i. And, when the works of the flesh are substituted for faith, self-confidence and pride are the inevitable result. "The reason of this contention lies in the fact that man is not only poor, but proud; not only guilty, but conceited; so that he will not humble himself to be saved upon terms of divine charity. He will not consent to believe God; he prefers to believe in the proud falsehoods of his own heart, which delude him into the flattering hope that he may merit eternal life." (Spurgeon)

3. (4) A question about the past: Was it all for nothing?

Have you suffered so many things in vain; if indeed *it was* in vain?

a. **Have you suffered so many things in vain:** Apparently, the Galatians had (perhaps when Paul was among them) suffered for the principle of faith (probably at the hands of legalistic Christians). Does their departure from the principle of faith mean that this past suffering was **in vain**?

i. We know that Paul did suffer persecution in this region. [Acts 14](#) makes it clear that Paul and his companions were persecuted vigorously (Paul even being stoned and left for dead) by the Jews when they were among the cities of Galatia. Surely some of this persecution spilled over to the Christian congregations Paul left behind in Galatia.

b. A better translation of the phrase **have you suffered so many things in vain** may be "Have you had such wonderful spiritual experiences, all to no purpose?" This may fit the context better. Paul wonders if all the gifts of the Spirit they had received would amount to no lasting value because now they try to walk by law, not by faith.

4. (5) Paul asks them to examine the source of the Spirit's work.

Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

a. **He who supplies the Spirit to you:** Who supplies the Holy Spirit? Obviously, the Spirit is given as a gift from God.

b. **Does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** God supplies the Holy Spirit in response to **faith**. Miracles are wrought by **faith**. Yet the Galatians have been deceived into thinking that real spiritual riches lie in pursuing God through a *works* relationship.

c. **By the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Paul repeats the phrase from [Galatians 3:2](#), because he wants to emphasize there is a choice to be made. Which will it be? Do you believe you will be blessed **by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Will you *earn and deserve* your blessing from God, or will you *believe and receive* it?

i. This speaks to those who see *lack of blessing*. Why? Not from a lack of devotion, not because they haven't earned enough; but because they are not putting their faith, their joyful, confident expectation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ii. This speaks to those who are *wonderfully blessed*. How? For them to be proud is to be *blind*. They have not earned their blessing, why should they take pride in it? All the more they should look to Jesus, and put their expectation in Him.

B. Abraham: an example of those justified and walking by faith.

1. (6) How Abraham was made righteous before God.

"Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

a. **Just as Abraham:** Among the Galatian Christians, the push towards a works-based relationship with God came from certain Christians who were born as Jews, and who claimed Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. Therefore, Paul uses **Abraham** as an example of being right before God by **faith**, not by faith plus works.

i. [Galatians 3:5](#) ended with a question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit and see miracles among you by the work of the law, or by faith? Paul assumes the answer, being "Of course we received the Holy Spirit and have seen miracles through faith." Now Paul will show that it is more than a matter of personal experience; God's work revealed in His Word demonstrates the same truth.

ii. "It mattered a great deal to the apostle that God saves people by grace, not on the grounds of their human achievement, and he found Abraham an excellent example of that truth." (Morris)

iii. "The following passage [vv. 6-9](#) was omitted in Marcion's recension of the epistle, as repugnant to his leading principle of the antagonism between the Old and New Testaments." (Lightfoot)

b. **Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness:** Paul quotes here from [Genesis 15:6](#). It simply shows that **righteousness** was **accounted** to Abraham because he **believed God**. It was *not* because he performed some work, and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

i. [Genesis 15:1-6](#) shows that when Abraham put his trust in God, specifically in God's promise to give him children that would eventually bring forth the Messiah, God credited this belief to Abraham's account as righteousness. "Abraham was not justified merely because he believed that God would multiply his seed, but because he embraced the grace of God, trusting to the promised Mediator." (Calvin)

ii. There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we *accomplish* by our own efforts, and righteousness *accounted* to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: **Abraham believed God**.

c. This quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#) is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith alone. It is the gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament ([Romans 4:3](#), [Romans 4:9-10](#), [Romans 4:22](#) and here in [Galatians 3:6](#)).

i. [Romans 4:9-10](#) makes much of the fact this righteousness was accounted to Abraham before he was *circumcised* ([Genesis 17](#)). No one could say Abraham was made righteous because of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abraham as righteous.

ii. We should be careful to say that Abraham's faith did not make him righteous. Abraham's *God* made him righteous, by accounting his faith to him for righteousness. "His faith was not his righteousness, but God so rewarded his exercise of faith, as that upon it he reckoned (or imputed) ... the righteousness of him in whom he believed." (Poole)

d. **Accounted to him for righteousness:** Abraham's experience shows that God *accounts* us as righteous, because of what Jesus did for us, as we receive what He did for us by faith.

i. Morris on **accounted**: "It has a meaning like 'reckon, calculate', and may be used of placing something to someone's account, here of placing righteousness to Abraham's account."

ii. If God accounts Abraham as righteous, then that is how Abraham should account himself. That is his standing before God, and God's accounting is not pretending. God does not account to us a pretended righteousness, but a real one in Jesus Christ.



e. **Believed God:** It wasn't that Abraham believed *in* God (as we usually speak of believing in God). Instead, it was that Abraham **believed God**. Those who only believe *in* God, in the sense that they believe He exists, are only as spiritual as demons! (James 2:19)

i. "*Believed*, of course, means more than that he accepted what God said as true (though, of course, he did that); it means that he trusted God." (Morris)

ii. Generally speaking, ancient Rabbis did not really admire Abraham's *faith*. The believed he was so loved by God because he was thought to have kept the law hundreds of year before it was given. For these and other reasons, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved *their* point. "Paul's emphasis on Abraham's faith must have come as a complete surprise to the Galatians." (Morris)

iii. However, some Rabbis have seen the importance of Abraham's faith. "It is remarkable that the Jews themselves maintained that Abraham was saved by faith. *Mehilta, in Yalcut Simeoni*, page 1, fol. 69, makes this assertion: 'It is evident that Abraham could not obtain an inheritance either in this world or in the world to come, but by faith.'" (Clarke)

iv. "Faith in God constitutes the highest worship, the prime duty, the first obedience, and the foremost sacrifice. Without faith God forfeits His glory, wisdom, truth, and mercy in us. The first duty of man is to believe in God and to honor Him with his faith. Faith is truly the height of wisdom, the right kind of righteousness, the only real religion ... Faith says to God: 'I believe what you say.'" (Luther)

## 2. (7) The true sons of Abraham.

Therefore know that *only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham*.

a. **Therefore know:** The emphasis is clear. Paul is making an important point, and he wants everyone of his readers to understand it.

i. "*Know* is imperative; Paul commands the Galatians to acquire this piece of knowledge." (Morris)

b. **Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham:** Since Abraham was made righteous by **faith**, and not by works, Abraham is therefore the father of everyone who believes God and is accounted righteous.

i. "It is always possible that we should translate *huioi Abraam*, not so much *children* (or 'sons') of Abraham as 'real Abrahams.'" (Cole)

c. What a rebuke this was to the Jewish Christians who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the law! They believed they were superior, because they descended from Abraham, and observed the law. Paul says that the most important link to Abraham is not the link of *genetics*, not the link of *works*, but the link of **faith**.

i. This would have been a shocking change of thinking for these particular opponents of Paul. They deeply believed that they had a standing before God because they were *genetically* descended from Abraham. At that time, some Jewish Rabbis taught that Abraham stood at the gates of Hell, just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally slipped by. John the Baptist dealt with this same thinking when he said *do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father."* For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones (Matthew 3:9). Paul is knocking down their blind reliance on *genetic* relation to Abraham, and showing that what really matters is *faith in Jesus*.

ii. It's the same today when people believe God accepts them because they come from a Christian family. God is a Father, not a grandfather; everyone must have their own faith in God.

d. What a comfort this was to the Gentile Christians who were regarded as "second class Christians" by many! Now they could know that they had a real, important link to Abraham, and could consider themselves **sons of Abraham**.

e. Sadly, Christians have taken this glorious truth and misapplied it through the centuries. This has been a verse that many claim in support of *replacement theology* - the idea that God is *finished* with the people of Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group, and that the Church spiritually inherits all the promises made to Israel.

i. Replacement theology has done tremendous damage in the Church, providing the theological fuel for the fires of horrible persecution of the Jews. If [Galatians 3:7](#) were the only verse in the Bible speaking to the issue, there might be a place for saying that the Church has completely replaced Israel. But we understand the Bible according to its entire message, and allow one passage to give light to others.

ii. For example, [Romans 11:25](#) (*hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*) states clearly that God is *not* finished with Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group. Even though God has turned the focus of His saving mercies away from Israel on to the Gentiles, He will turn it back again. This simple passage refutes those who insist that God is forever done with Israel as Israel, and that the Church is the New Israel and inherits every promise ever made to national and ethnic Israel of the Old Testament.

iii. We are reminded of the enduring character of the promises made to national and ethnic Israel (such as Genesis and [Genesis 17:7-8](#)). God is not "finished" with Israel, and Israel is not "spiritualized" as the church. While we do see and rejoice in a continuity of God's work throughout all His people through all generations, we still see a distinction between Israel and the Church - a distinction that Paul understands well.

f. All who put their faith in Jesus Christ **are sons of Abraham**; but Abraham has his *spiritual* sons and his *genetic* sons, and God has a plan and a place for both. But no one can deny that it is far more important to be a *spiritual* son of Abraham than a *genetic* son.

3. (8-9) This blessing of righteousness by faith is for all nations.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

a. **And the Scripture:** Paul is speaking from the Scriptures. He has already spoken from his personal experience, and from the experience of the Galatian Christians themselves. But this passage is even more important, because it shows how Paul's teaching is correct according to the Bible itself.

i. It would have been just fine for Paul's opponents to say, "Experiences are just fine Paul, but show us from the Scriptures." Paul was more than ready to take up the challenge.

ii. **The Scripture, foreseeing ... preached ... saying:** Remarkably, Paul refers to the **Scriptures** virtually as a person, who foresees, preaches, and says. This shows just how strongly Paul regarded the Bible as God's word. Paul believed that when the Scriptures speak, God speaks.

iii. "Paul personifies Scripture." (Morris) "Excellently spake he, who called the Scripture, *Cor et animam Dei*, The heart and soul of God." (Trapp)

b. **Foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith:** Paul observes that even back in Abraham's day it was clear that this blessing of righteousness by faith was intended for every nation, for Gentiles as well as Jews, because God pronounced that **in you all the nations shall be blessed** ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

i. The intention is to destroy the idea that a Gentile must first become a Jew before they can become a Christian. If that were necessary, God would never have said this blessing would extend to every nation, because Gentiles would have had to become part of the Israelite nation to be saved.

ii. The idea is that the gospel goes *out to the nations*, not that the nations come and assimilate into Israel.

c. **Those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham:** The *blessing* we receive with **believing Abraham** is not the blessing of fantastic wealth and power, though Abraham was extremely wealthy and powerful. The blessing is something far more precious: the blessing of a right standing with God through faith.

i. "The faith of the fathers was directed at the Christ who was to come, while ours rests in the Christ who has come." (Luther)

d. The most important question to ask is, "Am I **of faith**?" Do I *believe God* even as Abraham did? When God says it, do I believe it? Do I *live* as if I really believe God is true? Can others see that I am trusting God?

i. "*They who are of faith* are those whose characteristic is faith; it is not that they sometimes have an impulse to believe, but rather that believing is their constant attitude; faith is characteristic of them." (Morris)

### C. The Law in light of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

1. (10) The Old Testament tells us that the Law of Moses brings a curse.

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."

a. **For as many as are under the works of the law:** Paul is addressing those who think that their law-performance can give them a standing before God.

i. The transition from believing Abraham ([Galatians 3:9](#)) to those who are **of the works of the law** has a purpose. "If even the great patriarch was accepted by God only because of his faith, then it follows that lesser mortals will not succeed in producing the good deeds that would allow them to be accepted before God." (Morris)

ii. Morris on **as many as are of the works of the law:** "The preposition denotes origin and here will mean those whose essential position originates in the law, those who see law-keeping as the essence of our approach to God. It is not simply that they see the law as important: they see it as all-important. Their whole position depends on the keeping of the law."

iii. "The hypocritical doers of the Law are those who seek to obtain a righteousness by a mechanical performance of good works while their hearts are far removed from God. They act like the foolish carpenter who starts with the roof when he builds a house." (Luther)

b. **For as many as are under the works of the law are under the curse:** The Christians from a Jewish background who believed we should still live under the Law of Moses thought that it was a path to *blessing*. Paul boldly declares that instead of blessing, living **under the works of the law** puts them **under the curse**.

i. It isn't hard to see how these Christians believed that living under law brought blessing. They could read in the Old Testament many passages that supported this thinking. [Psalm 119:1](#) says, *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!* [Psalm 1:1-2](#) says, *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

ii. How does the law bring blessing? First, we must understand that the word *law* is used in two senses in the Bible. Sometimes it means "the Law of Moses, with all its commands, which a man must obey to be approved by God." Sometimes it means "God's Word" in a very general sense. Many times when the Old Testament speaks of the law, it speaks of it in the general sense of God's Word to us. When Psalm says *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*, the Psalmist means more than just the Law of Moses. He means all of God's Word. Seeing

this, we understand how the Bible is filled with praise for the law. Secondly, we are blessed when we keep the law because we are living according to the "instruction manual" for life. There is an inherent, built-in blessing in living the way God says we should live, in fulfilling the "manufacturer's recommendation."

iii. When Paul says that **as are under the works of the law are under the curse**, he doesn't mean that the law is bad or the Word of God is wrong. He simply means that God never intended the law to be the way we find our approval before Him. He knew we could never keep the law, and so God instituted the system of *atonement sacrifice* along with the law. And the entire sacrificial system looked forward to what Jesus would accomplish on the cross for us.

c. To prove his point Scripturally, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy: **Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them**. The Old Testament itself shows us that if we do not keep **all things** in the law, and actually **do them**, then we are under a curse.

i. The important words are **all** and **do**. If God would approve you on the basis of the law, you first have to **do** it. Not simply know it, not simply love it, not simply teach it, not simply want it, you must **do** it. Secondly, you have to do it **all**. Not some. Not just when you are over 18 or 40. Not just more good than bad. [Deuteronomy 27:26](#) specifically says that to be justified by the law, you must **do** it, and do it in **all things**.

ii. **All** means a lot. It means that while some sins are worse than others are, there are no small sins before such a great God. "Jewish keepers of the law would overlook small transgressions. Paul would not." (Morris)

iii. "It is worthy of remark that no *printed* copy of the Hebrew Bible preserves the word *col*, ALL, in Deuteronomy, which answers to the apostle's word *all*, here. St. Jerome says that the Jews suppressed it, lest it should appear that they were bound to perform *all* things that are written in the book of the law. Of the genuineness of the reading there is no cause to doubt: it exists in *six* MSS. of *Kennicott* and *De Rossi*, in the *Samaritan* text, in several copies of the *Targum*, in the *Septuagint*, and in the quotation made here by the apostle, in which there is no variation either in the MSS. or in the *versions*." (Clarke)

d. Paul's point is heavy; it weighs us down with a curse. If you are under the works of the law, the only way you can stand approved and blessed before God by the law is to **do** it, and to do it **all**. If you don't, you are **cursed**.

i. **Cursed** is a word that sounds strange in our ears. We think of witches boiling a strange mixture in a dark cauldron. We think of a Snidely Whiplash kind of guy saying "Curses, foiled again!" But in the Bible, the idea of being **cursed** is important, and frightening - because we are talking about being **cursed** by God. Not only **cursed** by our own bad choices, not only **cursed** by this wicked world, not only **cursed** by the Devil - but especially **cursed** by God. He is the one Person you don't want to be **cursed** by!

ii. "The law holds all men under its curse. From the law, therefore, it is useless to seek a blessing." (Calvin)

2. (11) The Old Testament tells us that a right standing before God comes by faith, not by the law.

**But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."**

a. **But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident**: Paul has already proven this point in the Scriptures by examining the life of Abraham ([Galatians 3:5-9](#)). Now he brings in another passage from the Old Testament, [Habakkuk 2:4](#), which reminds us that the just live by **faith**, not by law.

i. The Jews themselves sensed that because none could keep it perfectly, salvation could not come through keeping the law. This is why they placed such emphasis on their descent from Abraham, essentially trusting in Abraham's merits to save them because they sensed that their own merits could not.

b. **The just shall live by faith**: This brief statement from the prophet Habakkuk is one of the most important, and most quoted Old Testament statements in the New Testament. Paul uses it here to show that the **just** live **by faith**, not by law. Being under the law isn't the way to be found **just** before God, only living by faith is.

i. If you are found to be **just** - approved - before God, you have done it by a life of **faith**. If your life is all about living under the law, then God does not find you approved.

ii. "For the present question is not whether believers ought to keep the law as far as they can (which is beyond all doubt), but whether they obtain righteousness by works; and this is impossible." (Calvin)

c. Every word in [Habakkuk 2:4](#) is important, and the Lord quotes it three times in the New Testament just to bring out the fullness of the meaning!

i. In [Romans 1:17](#), when Paul quotes this same passage from Habakkuk, the emphasis is on *faith*: "The just shall live by **faith**."

ii. In [Hebrews 10:38](#), when the writer to the Hebrews quotes this same passage from [Habakkuk 2:4](#), the emphasis is on *live*: "The just shall **live** by faith."

iii. Here in [Galatians 3:11](#), when Paul quotes this passage from [Habakkuk 2:4](#), the emphasis is on *just*: "The **just** shall live by faith."

3. (12) The Old Testament tells us that approval by God through the law must be earned by actually living in obedience to the law, not just trying.

Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

a. **Yet the law is not of faith**: Some might come back to Paul and say, "Look, I'll do the best I can under the law and let faith cover the rest. God will look at my performance, my effort, and my good intentions and credit to me as righteousness. The important thing is that I am really trying." Paul proves from the Old Testament itself that this simply isn't good enough. No; the paths of approval by **the law** and **faith** don't run together, because **the law is not of faith**.

b. **The man who does them shall live by them**: The quote from Leviticus is clear. If you want to **live** by the law, you must *do* it. Not *try to do it*, not *intend to do it*, and not even *want to do it*. No, it is only **the man who does them who shall live by them**.

i. It is very easy to comfort ourselves with our good intentions. We all mean very well; but if we want to find our place before God by our works under the law, good intentions are never enough. A good effort isn't enough. Only actual *performance* will do.

c. This passage from [Leviticus 18:5](#) is another often-quoted principle from the Old Testament. Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 9:29](#)) quoted it in his great prayer for Israel. The LORD Himself quoted it through the prophet Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 20:11, 13, and 21](#)). Paul also quotes it again in [Romans 10:5](#)).

d. The effect of Paul's use of Scripture in [Galatians 3:10-12](#) is overwhelming. We understand that we don't actually *do* the law. We understand that we don't actually do *all* the law. And we understand that this put us under a *curse*. [Galatians 3:10-12](#) is the bad news; now Paul begins to explain the good news.

4. (13-14) Jesus redeems us from the curse of the law.

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"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

a. **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law**: Because we didn't actually do it, and do it all, the law put us under a curse. But now Jesus **has redeemed us from the curse of the law**. **Redeemed** has the idea of "buying back" or

"purchasing out of." It isn't just rescuing; it is paying a price to rescue. Jesus bought us out from under the **curse of the law**.

i. In Jesus, we aren't cursed anymore! [Galatians 3:10-12](#) left us all under a curse, but we are not cursed anymore because Jesus bought us out from under the curse.

ii. **Redemption** is an important idea. "Redemption points to the payment of a price that sets sinners free." (Morris) **Redemption** came from the practices of ancient warfare. After a battle the victors would often capture some of the defeated. Among the defeated, the poorer ones would usually be sold as slaves, but the wealthy and important men, the men who mattered in their own country, would be held to ransom. When the people in their homeland had raised the required price, they would pay it to the victors and the captives would be set free. The process was called redemption, and the price was called the ransom.

iii. The image took root in other areas. When a slave had his freedom purchased - perhaps by a relative, perhaps by his own diligent work and saving - this was called "**redemption**." Sometimes the transaction took place at a temple, and a record was carved in the wall so everyone would forever know that this former slave was now a redeemed, free man. Or, a man condemned to death might be set free by the paying of a price, and this was considered "redemption." Most importantly, Jesus bought us out of defeat, out of slavery, and out of a death sentence to reign as kings and priests with Him forever.

b. How did Jesus do it? How did He pay a price to rescue us? **Having become a curse for us** means that Jesus became cursed on our behalf; He stood in our place and took the curse we deserved.

i. It stops us in our tracks to understand that the price He paid to buy us out from under the **curse of the law** was the price of Himself. It didn't just cost Jesus something, even something great - it cost Jesus Himself. We know that men cursed Jesus as He hung on the cross; but that compares nothing to how He was cursed by God the Father. He made Himself the target of the curse, and set those who believe outside the target.

ii. "Paul does not say that Christ was made a curse for Himself. The accent is on the two words, 'for us.' Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor." (Luther)

iii. "All the prophets of old said that Christ should be the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, blasphemer that ever was or ever could be on earth. When He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, Christ was no longer an innocent person. He was a sinner burdened with the sins of a Paul who was a blasphemer; burdened with the sins of a Peter who denied Christ; burdened with the sins of a David who committed adultery and murder, and gave the heathen occasion to laugh at the Lord. In short, Christ was charged with all the sins of all me, that He should pay with them with His own blood. The curse struck Him." (Luther)

iv. "I am told that it is preposterous and wicked to call the Son of God a cursed sinner. I answer: If you deny that He is a condemned sinner, you are forced to deny that Christ died. It is not less preposterous to say, the Son of God died, than to say, the Son of God was a sinner." (Luther)

v. "Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ's sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ's sins or we shall perish forever." (Luther)

c. **For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."** *When* did Jesus pay this price? The principle of Deuteronomy shows that Jesus received this curse upon Himself as He hung on the cross, fulfilling the Deuteronomy promise of a curse to all who are not only executed but have their bodies publicly exposed to shame.

i. "This passage did not refer to crucifixion (which the Jews did not practise), but to the hanging on a tree or wooden post of the corpse of a criminal who had been executed. But in the New Testament times a cross was often called a tree and there is no doubting that that is what Paul has in mind here." (Morris)

ii. **Hangs on a tree:** In the thinking of ancient Israel, there was something worse than being put to death. Worse than that was to be put to death, and to have your corpse left in the open, exposed to shame, humiliation, and scavenging animals and birds. When it says **hangs on a tree**, it does not have the idea of being executed by strangulation; but of having the corpse "mounted" on a tree or other prominent place, to expose the executed one to the elements and supreme disgrace.

iii. However, if anyone was executed, and deemed worthy of such disgrace, the humiliation to his memory and his family must not be excessive. [Deuteronomy 21:23](#) also says "*his body shall not remain overnight on the tree.*" This was a way of tempering even the most severe judgment with mercy. Significantly, Jesus fulfilled this also, being taken down from the cross before night had fully come ([John 19:31-33](#)).

d. **Cursed is everyone:** The punishment of being hanged on a tree, and left to open exposure, was thought to be so severe that it was reserved only for those for which it was to be declared: "this one is **cursed** by God." So Jesus not only died in our place; but He took the place as the **cursed** of God, being hung on a "tree" in open shame and degradation.

e. **That the blessing of Abraham might come:** Jesus received this curse, which we deserved and He did not, so that we could receive the *blessing of Abraham*, which He deserved and we did not! It would be enough if Jesus simply took away the curse we deserved. But He did far more than that; He also gave a **blessing** that we didn't deserve!

i. What is **the blessing of Abraham**? It is what Paul already described in [Galatians 3:8-9](#), the blessing of being justified before God by faith, instead of works.

f. Who does the **blessing of Abraham** come to? **The Gentiles in Christ Jesus.** Paul doesn't mean that it *only* comes upon Gentiles, as if Jews were excluded, but that it - quite unexpectedly to some - comes upon the Gentiles also, to those **Gentiles in Christ Jesus.**

i. The phrase **in Christ Jesus** is important. The blessing doesn't come *because* they are Gentiles, any more than the blessing of being right with God comes to Jewish people because they are Jews. It comes to all, Jew and Gentile alike, who are identified **in Christ Jesus**, and not by their own attempts to justify themselves.

g. Because this blessing is ours in Jesus, we **receive the promise of the Spirit through faith** - not through coming back under the law as the principle for living. The promise is *received*, not *earned*.