

GALATIANS 4

Remember

“The gospel is not good news primarily of a baby in a manger, a young man at a carpenter’s bench, a preacher in the fields of Galilee, or even an empty tomb. The Gospel concerns Christ upon His cross. Only when Christ is ‘openly displayed upon his cross’ (NEB) is the gospel preached.”¹

The foot of the cross is home. It’s the place we must

return when lost, it’s where we come back to ourselves, the light shines again, and we remember. We remember when we trusted in Christ and lived for the first time. The fog over our minds and the hardness of our hearts melts. In chapter three of Galatians, Paul is asking the church to come home, to come back from where they have been and to remember, not only their personal experience of Christ, but also that of those before them, way before them.

In the first five verses, it is plausible that Paul didn’t take a breath or blink an eye while writing. The message of the cross had been so thoroughly portrayed and preached to the Galatian churches, they might as well have watched the crucifixion firsthand. Unsurprisingly, Paul is aghast at their acceptance of false teaching and calls them to remember their salvation experience and all that surrounded it.

Two powerful truths are unpacked in these first five verses. One, when they believed in Christ by faith, the blessed Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, entered their hearts. Two, not only did He enter their hearts, He immediately ushered them into the realm of the supernatural, and the kingdom that is unseen, a reality proven through manifestations of power. Hence, Paul’s first point in his case to Galatia is, if the Holy Spirit entered your heart through faith, and gave you signs of His entrance through supernatural experiences, how could you doubt the completeness of your salvation and add anything to the already finished work of the cross? Biblical Scholar, F.F. Bruce states “They began their Christian career in [or with] the Spirit; can they now find it conceivable that the perfection of that career is to be sought on the lower plane of ‘flesh’? ‘Flesh’ here is not simply the body, in which circumcision is carried out, but human nature in its unregenerate weakness.”²

Good works and effort are a natural response of gratitude for the acceptance we have received as God’s children, yet not a requirement for our justification. This is the distinctive beauty of Christianity: we are received by God on the grounds of faith in Him, not by our efforts and works for Him! “The churches in Galatia were struggling with this. They wanted to be accepted by God, but seemed to forget God had already accepted them!”³ What a gift to have God’s Spirit, His seal of approval and acceptance, by faith in Christ alone, and what a revelation to know that as we journey as His followers, it is by faith in who Christ is that we are able to do life day to day and not by our own aptitude to perform.

Pre-Article Questions:

1. How does our culture value or promote “working hard” to gain approval or acceptance by others?
2. If you are a Christian, what do you find the most enjoyable about your relationship with God?

1. Stott, 74.

2. Bruce, F.F, 149.

3. InterVarsity Press, Daily Bible Study, Galatians 3:1-14: Why God Accepts Us, www.ivpress.com

Paul proves this doctrine, yet again, in the following verses by taking us back to Abraham's own journey before God. Abraham's story and encounters with God foretold and whispered of the worldwide impact the cross would have. Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and journey to a land called Canaan where God would give him and his people insurmountable blessings. In Genesis 15, God promised Abraham that his descendents would outnumber the stars. Abraham believed and trusted in God's promise to him, even though this would have been physically impossible due to his age. His belief was credited as righteousness. "Paul's allusion to Abraham was a master-stroke. His Judaizing opponents looked to Moses as their teacher. So Paul went centuries further back to Abraham himself...He was not justified because he had done anything to deserve it, or because he had been circumcised (for neither circumcision nor the law had yet been given), but simply because he believed in God." ⁴

Abraham was justified and accepted by God on the grounds of his faith way before he practiced circumcision in Genesis 17. Furthermore, in Genesis 12:3, God tells Abraham that in him all nations would be blessed. This was a prophetic utterance by God with the cross of His Son and the salvation of the Gentiles in full view! Abraham's experience with God proved the doctrine of justification by faith was not new! Abraham was accepted by God through His faith and because of the cross, all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, would be 'blessed' or 'justified' by the same means.

Lastly, after Paul reviews the blessings of Abraham and the wonderful implications for Gentiles, he then cites the curses of Deuteronomy 27-28 on those who do not obey the law, demonstrating that those who are under the law are under God's curse because the law cannot be kept perfectly (the requirement for justification by the law). Gentiles from Galatia could not pick and choose which part of the law they would practice.⁵ "Paul's point is that those who choose to live by the law thereby exclude themselves from the blessing, because they must now "abide in the whole law, to do it," and they are cursed if they do not "abide." Paul shows the Galatians the total incompatibility of living on the basis of faith while also trying to live on the basis of doing the law."⁶ The curse was broken when Christ hung on the cross once and for all. He took the "curse of the law and sin" upon himself. The way to God was not and is not through perfect obedience of the law, even if someone could attain to this, like Paul himself said he did before he knew Christ. Salvation has always been through faith in God's promises, which were originally mediated by the law in the old covenant and now are fulfilled in Jesus' perfect substitutionary sacrifice. By God's wonderful grace, we can now look upon the cross and live, simply by gazing into the fiery eyes of our beloved Jesus Christ and saying, "I believe in You!"

Article Question:

1. What do you find encouraging about Abraham's covenant story with God?

Galatians 3:1-14, NIV

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 the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? 4 Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? 5 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? 6 So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7 Understand, then, that

4. Stott, 72,73.

5. Fee, 119.

6. Fee, 118.

those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 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 rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 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." 11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person 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 pole." 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.

Study Questions:

1. In verses 1-5, describe why Paul was so taken back by the behavior of the Galatian churches?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Romans 5:5, and 1 Corinthians 6:19. The Galatians churches received the Holy Spirit when they believed in Christ. How does knowing that the Spirit of God lives in you when you are saved strengthen your faith daily?
3. How does knowing the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you make a difference in the way you live? Why is this such "good news" for the world around us? How does this indwelling set Christianity apart from other religions?
4. Read verses 1-5 & 1 Peter 3:15, when we are telling others about the cross of Jesus Christ, how are we to do so?
5. Can you describe a positive time you shared about the cross of Christ with someone and it planted an awesome seed or they actually received Christ right then and there?
6. According to Galatians 3:5, miracles were an ongoing occurrence among these believers. Why is it so important that we do not shun the gifts of the Holy Spirit from working among us as believers in an orderly, submitted fashion? (1 Corinthians 12:7)
7. Read Genesis 12:3, 15:1-6, and Hebrews 11:8-12. In what ways does Abraham's story serve as a counter to the argument for circumcision being added to the criteria for the salvation of Gentiles?
8. How do you feel tonight knowing that you don't have to seek to gain God's acceptance through your efforts and works, you are already accepted if you have put your trust in His Son, Jesus Christ?
9. In what ways does the devil try to steal that joy of unmerited approval and acceptance by God in your life? What practical and spiritual steps can we take to fight those fiery darts of Satan about how God sees us?
10. Acts 17:28 says we are God's offspring, in Him we live, move, and have our being. It takes the same faith for salvation as it does for our day-to-day relationship with God, known as our sanctification. How are you living by faith this semester? What are some of the obstacles you are facing to living this way? How can our life group pray for you tonight?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read and discuss:

1. Read Genesis 12:1-9 and Genesis 15.
2. Describe some of the promises God made to Abraham.
3. In what ways do Abraham's encounters with God encourage and challenge you?
4. What do these passages of scripture communicate about the nature of our God?
5. In your present journey with God, what is currently "stretching" your faith the most?

Scripture Memory:
Galatians 3:13-14