

“<sup>1</sup> O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? <sup>2</sup> This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup> Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain. <sup>5</sup> He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>6</sup> ¶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. <sup>7</sup> Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. <sup>9</sup> So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” (Ga 3:1-9)

The question among the church in Galatia was whether it was necessary for them to be circumcised and live according to the manner of the Jews in order to be justified—in order to have peace with God. The circumcision party said that they did. Paul is emphatic that they did not—in fact, to add the works of the law to any part of their justification was to depart from Christ and to have no part in Him.

It is very important that you and I be crystal clear on this point. The Apostle’s language is very strong—some of the strongest language in the Bible, in fact. It is no minor theological point for which Paul is contending, but the very Gospel itself. Peter and others had refused to fellowship with those who were uncircumcised, and Paul is outraged at the very idea that something must be added to the Gospel of Christ in order for a person to be a “complete” Christian. The idea that Jewish ceremonies could make Christians complete will result in them being cut off from Christ.

In order to carry his point, Paul uses a contrast that he also used in his other writings: He contrasts the flesh with the Spirit. There are two very different theological attitudes that he contrasts. In verse 2 he calls on this contrast by using the phrases “the works of the law” and the “hearing of faith.” He drives his point home by asking the question, “Which one of these operations resulted in the reception of the Holy Spirit?”

Now it is clear from the Old Testament that when Messiah came, there would be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There are three ways that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit may be considered:

1. It could mean a change of heart in the covenant people: For instance, see Ezekiel 38:25-28 *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Where the Holy Spirit is, there is a softness and tenderness toward God, an obedient and contrite heart.*
2. It could mean a gathering of the Gentiles into the covenant—so that the exclusivity of Israel would no longer be God’s way of dealing with the world. Joel 2:28-32:

*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

3. It could also mean the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, signs and wonders, such things that were foretold by Joel in this passage that was quoted above, and cited by Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

Which is it? What does Paul mean when He says “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith.” I do not think it matters. The meaning will be the same. Paul includes both the inward work of the Spirit when he says in verse three, “Having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect by the flesh?” and he includes the other meanings when he says “He who supplies and works miracles among you.”

The meaning is this. When Christ came, when the Son of God entered into the world, incarnate in the Virgin Mary, God had decreed there would be a much fuller manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit—not only working in the hearts of God’s people, but also in a great expansion of this work into all the world, accompanied by great signs and wonders. This could come about—and did come about—not be lawkeeping, but by the lively preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The mighty manifestations of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit were to be connected to Jesus Christ and the Gospel, and were not appendages of the law of Moses.

In order to prove his point, Paul cites the example of Abraham. “What about Abraham: he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.” What did Abraham believe, “in thee shall all the families of the world be blessed.” The calling of the Gentiles and the outpouring of the Spirit were included in the promise God made to Abraham, according to the Apostle Paul.

I will follow Calvin for a few minutes here to draw out what the meaning is.

- I. What does Paul mean by faith?
- II. What is “righteousness”?
- III. Why is faith so honored?

- I. Faith is not just accepting any sort of idea about the existence of God and the truth of religion. No, the works of the law are contrasted with faith—one is said to be of the flesh, the other of the Spirit. Israel accepted many true things about the One God, but they did not have faith. It is by faith, Paul tells us in Romans 5, that we have access into the Grace of God in which we stand.
- II. What is this grace of God which we access? It is “righteousness.” What does it mean that Abraham was counted righteous? Whatever it means, it was something that the Gentiles would inherit along with Abraham. This means that it cannot be simply that Abraham was counted a good man and worthy of receiving the land of Canaan, for that would mean that we all would inherit as he inherited, and there is not room over there for Jews and Arabs, let alone for all the Christians to get in there too.

No, the inheritance that Abraham received was the favor of God and eternal life, because he looked for a city that has foundation, whose builder and maker is God. This answers the questions, was there no work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament—yes, but His work did not come because of the law, but because of faith, for Abraham believed God long before the law was given by Moses.

Israel did not inherit Canaan because they kept the law—they inherited it because of the faith of Abraham. They lost Canaan, not because of their transgressions of the God—God had provided a way for their sins to be taken away. They lost it because they did not believe the promises. Over and over again, God pled with them to turn away from their transgressions and return to Him. He would forgive their sins, He promised. With these pleadings are promises over and over of the coming of

the Messiah. If they would believe, they would be established. But they were proud and arrogant, self-righteous and sturdy in their unbelief. And so they perished.

Jesus himself said that “Abraham rejoiced to see my day.” How could Abraham see the day of Christ—only by faith. Christ was in the Old Covenant in the promises, and to the extent that the light of Christ shone in Israel through the promises, to that extent the Holy Spirit’s work is seen. But the full glory of the Spirit comes through the preaching of Christ, and not the works of the law.

Therefore those who receive the Gospel with the hearing of faith are called the children of Abraham. The true sons of Abraham are not those who are of the flesh of Abraham and under the law of Moses, but those who believe as Abraham believed.

III. Faith is so honored because it brings all the glory to Christ and leaves nothing in ourselves. Abraham would have something to glory in, Paul says in Romans, if works had any part of his righteousness. But Abraham’s righteousness was completely of faith. This does not mean that faith itself is righteousness, but faith is our bond to Christ who is our righteousness.

This is the glory of biblical, saving faith. It removes our eyes from ourselves and fixes them upon Jesus Christ. The One who is displayed in Paul’s preaching of the Gospel is the One from whom all the blessing come.

- A. It is through Christ that we are humbled and our stony heart is taken away. It is God who does this by His Spirit, according to the passage we cited in Ezekiel, which was quoted by the writer of the book of Hebrews in this same context. According to II Peter 1, everything necessary for a complete and abundant Christianity comes to us by faith. It is by the promises of Christ that we are conformed to the image of Christ, by His Spirit who works in us.
- B. It is through Christ that the Gospel goes to all the world. “All power is given to me,” He said to his disciples. “Go into all the world and teach all nations. I will be with you, even until the end of the world.”
- C. It is through Christ that the gifts of the Spirit are given according to His own choice. He is the One who ascended up on high and gave gifts to His church, according to His Own will. It is through the hearing of faith that every good thing comes to the Church through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: All things are of Christ. He is the light that shines in Creation and the Word that brought order into the original creation. He is the One who communed with Adam and Eve, and it was His Word that was attacked by the Serpent. He is the light of the original gospel promise given to Eve, that the heel of her seed would bruise the head of the serpent. He is the Seed promised to Abraham who would bless the whole world. He is the Light of the World that shone dimly in the prophets but came to the fullness of glory in the Incarnation, the life, and the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the glory of Christ crucified that shines in the church—and it is his glory that will be seen in the final judgment and the rewarding of the righteous and the damnation of the unbelievers. It is He who administers the Holy Spirit to us, changing our hearts and changing the world. This is His work and does not come by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith.

May God bless you.