

True Life
Galatians 3.1-15
September 16

In Galatians 1-2, Paul defended his apostleship. Paul did not assert his apostleship because he felt insecure in the context of his opponents. In Paul's mind, a defense of his apostleship was a defense of the gospel since the gospel message came by revelation to the apostle (Gal. 1.12). In Galatians 3-4, Paul defends the gospel against the false teaching of legalism.

What may twenty-first century Christians learn about applying the gospel to real life?

First, a failure to focus the eyes on Christ crucified makes people foolish (Gal. 3.1). Is the real-life found through Christ crucified or legalism? Paul exclaimed that living under legalism makes people unintelligent (Ga. 3.1). "No mind" is a literal translation of the Greek term "foolish." Because the Galatians neglected the Lordship of Christ in the area of the mind or thought, they allowed someone (who? – maybe Satan) to bewitch or cast a spell on them. The ancients thought a magical spell could be cast upon someone through an "evil eye." God publicly portrayed Christ crucified. The verb translated "publicly portrayed" described a public notice. One Southern Baptist scholar described the meaning of the term – "had the clarity of an advertisement on a billboard." The Galatians took their eyes off the crucified Jesus and became foolish.

Second, living according to legalism opposes the ministry of the Spirit (Gal. 3.2-5). Paul's point is that legalism is the opposite of life in the Spirit. Paul asked the Galatians to recall the beginning of their Christian experience. Did God pour out the Spirit into their lives because of their obedience to the law or through faith? The answer, of course, is faith. Paul points out the foolish of attributing the beginning of the Christian life to the reception of the Spirit and growing or maturing as a Christian through legalism. Did the miraculous transformation of the new birth come through keeping a law or through the Spirit? The answer, of course, is the Spirit wrought the miracle of salvation.

Third, the Old Testament taught that salvation came through faith, not legalism (Gal. 3.6-9). Paul illustrated the truth of salvation by faith through the example of Abraham. God promised Abraham a vast land, a great name, and a great blessing, and the privilege of being a blessing to the entire world (Gen. 12.1-3). The privilege of Abraham being a blessing depended on an heir. God made a promise. Abraham believed the God of the promise. God accepted Abraham on the basis of his faith. Paul quoted Genesis 15.6: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." The Hebrew word translated "credited" was a bookkeeping term. A Hebrew dictionary provided a helpful definition of righteousness" means "adherence to what is required." Through faith, Abraham met God's requirement for a relationship with Him. Paul affirmed that the blessing of Abraham to the world (Gen. 12.3 & Gal. 3.8) were available to Gentiles through faith.

Fourth, the message of the gospel proclaims that Christ experienced a curse on our behalf (Ga. 4. 10-14). Rather than life, following the path of legalism is a curse because of human inability to keep the law. Obeying the law requires the keeping of the whole law according to Paul's citation of Deuteronomy 27.26. Further, Paul cited two additional Old Testament texts to outline in stark fashion the dramatic alternatives. In verse eleven, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2.4 as an affirmation of righteousness comes through faith. In verse twelve, the apostle cited Leviticus 18.5 as Scriptural evidence that the law requires the doing of the entire law. Christ delivered people from the curse of the law through experiencing the curse for us. "Redeemed" means to deliver through the payment of a price. Christ functioned as our representative and substitute. In His dual roles, Christ took upon Himself the curse due to us. Paul detailed two purposeful blessings. First, the blessings of Abraham flow to the Gentiles because Jesus received the curse for our sins. Second, because Jesus endured our curse, we can receive the Spirit.