

New Covenant Theology



Comparing and Contrasting the Covenants

- So far we have looked at a number of New Testament passages that compare and contrast **two** covenants:
 - The Old Covenant
 - The New Covenant
- We are now going to look at **Galatians 3:1-26** which describes the relationship between **three** covenants:
 - The Abrahamic Covenant
 - The Law of Moses (and the Old Covenant)
 - Christ (and the New Covenant)

Introduction to Galatians 3:1-26

- Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians because a group of Jewish false teachers whom scholars refer to as the “Judaizers” had infiltrated the Galatian churches and were attempting to persuade them to believe a different gospel from the one that Paul had taught them.
- The Judaizers told the Galatians that believing in Jesus was fine, but they also needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved.

Introduction to Galatians 3:1-26

- When we compare what Paul says in Galatians 3 with what we know of Jewish teaching in Paul's day, some scholars believe that one of the arguments that the Judaizers may have used is that God blessed Abraham for being circumcised and obeying his law. Therefore the Galatians must follow his example in order to be saved.*
- The Jews in Paul's day who held this view of Abraham would cite passages like Gen.26:3-5 to support their view :
 - [the LORD speaking to Isaac says:] *I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham... because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.* (Gen 26:3,5)

*Word Biblical Commentary on Galatians, Richard N. Longnecker, 1990, pp.110-111

Introduction to Galatians 3:1-26

- Here are just a few examples of the things that many Jews in Paul's day taught and believed about Abraham: *
 - *For Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.* (The Book of Jubilees 23:10 – written around 160–150 BC)
 - *Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?* (1 Maccabees 2:52 RSV – written around the 1st century BC)
- Assuming that the Judaizers did in fact use these arguments in their attempt to get the Galatians to obey the Law of Moses and be circumcised, let's begin looking at Galatians 3, starting with verses 1-14 in order to see how Paul responded to this argument.

Galatians 3:1-14

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ...² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?...⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith--⁶ just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:1-14

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall 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 hanged on a tree”-- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Observations on Galatians 3:1-14

I see Paul doing **two** things in Galatians 3:1-14:

1. Paul reminds the Galatians' of their personal experience in believing his gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit. He then goes on to cite a number of Old Testament scriptures which show that salvation is by ***faith, not law keeping***.
2. Paul tells us that the salvation of many nations (in the New Covenant) is a fulfillment of promises that God made to Abraham (in the Abrahamic Covenant).

Salvation is by Faith – Not Law Keeping

- Paul begins by appealing to the Galatians' personal experience in believing his gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit:
 - *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?... ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:2-5)*

Salvation is by Faith – Not Law Keeping

- Having appealed to their personal experience, Paul then goes on to make his case from ***scripture***.
- Paul starts with a quote from the book of Genesis which shows that Abraham was ***counted*** as righteous, because he ***believed*** (i.e. had faith in) God's promises (***not*** because he kept the Law):
 - *Abraham* [in Gen. 15:6] ***“believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”*** (Galatians 3:6)
- In fact, Paul says, we ***all*** receive the blessings of salvation through ***faith*** in the same way Abraham did:
 - *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith* (Galatians 3:9)

Salvation is by Faith – Not Law Keeping

- Paul then shows that in order for Abraham (or anyone else) to become righteous through law keeping, he would have to **do all** that the Law commands, and of course, neither he nor anyone else can do that.
- Which is why the book of Deuteronomy says that anyone who relies on law-keeping to get into right standing with God will end up being **cursed** by God:
 - *For all who rely on works of the law are under a **curse**; for it is written [in Deut. 27:26], “**Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.**” (Galatians 3:10)*

Salvation is by Faith – Not Law Keeping

- In fact, if you look at Habakkuk, Paul says, it's obvious that ***no one*** (including Abraham) is put in right standing with God by law keeping – those who **God** considers righteous are those who have been made spiritually alive by ***faith***:
 - *Now it is evident that ***no one*** is justified before God by the law, for* [as Hab. 2:4 says,] *"The righteous shall live by ***faith***."* (Galatians 3:11)
- Paul then goes on to show, as he did earlier from the book of Deuteronomy, that, according to the book of Leviticus, if anyone were to receive spiritual life by law keeping rather than faith, they would have to ***do*** all that the Law commands. But of course, no one (but Christ) can do that – not even Abraham.
 - *But the law is not of faith, rather* [as Lev. 18:5 says,] *"The one who ***does*** them shall live by them."* (Galatians 3:12)

Fulfillment of God's Promises to Abraham

- In following Abraham's example faith, Paul says, we become the ***spiritual offspring*** of Abraham:
 - *Know then that it is those of faith who are the **sons of Abraham**.* (Galatians 3:7)
- Indeed, Paul says, the fact that people from many Gentile nations (such as the Galatians) are being blessed to become Abraham's spiritual offspring (through faith) is a fulfillment of the a promise that God made to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant:
 - *And the Scripture [in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18], foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."* (Gal 3:8)

Fulfillment of God's Promises to Abraham

- And finally, Paul tells us, this salvation blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant was given to many Gentile nations, along with the Holy Spirit (one of the promised blessings of the New Covenant, see Ezekiel 36:27) because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by taking that curse on himself:
 - *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us ... in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*
(Galatians 3:13-14)

Questions

- How many of you are still a little confused about what Paul is saying in Galatians 3:1-14? And, if so, are there some specific things that I can try to clear up for you?
- How many of you feel pretty comfortable that you understand what Paul is saying in Galatians 3:1-14?
- How many of you feel like you'd be ready to explain this text to your kids or perhaps a Sunday School class of young people?