

NEW TESTAMENT 3

Paul's Letters - Week 3

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The experience of the Galatians is the same as that of Abraham - Faith is first and freedom follows.

The Law was always intended for those enslaved to sin, so returning to legalism is a return to slavery.

Before we begin...

Explain the place of the Old Testament law in Christian belief today.

Why do Christians struggle with understanding and applying the Old Testament law, even today?

Faith and the Galatians' experience

Gal 3:1-5

- What are the rhetorical questions in Gal 3:1-5?
- What is the self-evident answer to the question in 3:2?

By paralleling them, Paul equates "faith" ("believing what you heard" NIV 3:2) with receiving the Spirit of God and "works of the law" with "the flesh" ("human effort" NIV 3:3).

- What does Paul mean by "the flesh" in Gal 4:28-29; 5:13, 16-24; 6:12-13; Phil 3:2-6?
- How serious is the attempt to "finish" or *complete/fulfi* the gospel with works?

Faith and Abraham's example

Gal 3:6-18

- Compare 3:6-7 with Gen 15:6. What is Paul's extraordinary claim? (c.f. Rom 4)

Paul maintains that being "righteous" is an attributed status, not an ethical property. God treats Abraham's unreserved belief as undeserved righteousness. It is imputed to him.

- Compare 3:10-13 with Deut 27:26; Hab 2:4; Lev 18:5; Deut 21:23.
- By what mechanism is this extended to Gentile Christians? (v14)
- Explain the argument in 3:15-18.

Law and the Purpose of God

Gal 3:19-4:7

Paul is emphasizing the purpose of the Law as regards sin.

- Compare Rom 3:19f; 4:15; 5:13-20; 7:7-12
- How does the Law fulfil God's purpose in keeping people "in custody" (v23)?

The shift from 'we' and 'us' to 'you' seems to distinguish Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians. How are they different as regards the Law? How similar?

- How does the Law function according to Paul in Gal 4:1-7?

Law and Slavery

Gal 4:8-31

Paul's concern is that the Gentiles, having been freed from bondage to idolatry, will now be enslaved to a weak religion of Law-keeping. (4:8-9; 5:1-9)

- What is Paul's stated motivation for this concern? (4:11-20; c.f. 6:12-13)
- Explain the allegory drawn in 4:21-31.

Paul is influenced here by Isaiah's vision of a new Jerusalem and a new people.

- How does this characterize the Galatian Christians as different from the Jews?

Concluding

What is the historical purpose of the Law in relation to Christ?

How does Law-keeping fit into the Christian life today?

Praise God that we have been redeemed from the curse of the law and pray not to fall back into slavery to sin.

Read the articles on 'Abraham', 'Faith' and 'Law' in the *New Bible Dictionary*
Read Gal 5-6