

Galatians 3:1-14

Q: What is more important, the strength of your faith or the sincerity of your faith?

A: Trick question! Neither one is that important. It's the *object* of your faith that really counts.

Illustration: One child believes strongly and sincerely in the Tooth Fairy. His faith is perfect in every way: It's pure, it's earnest, and it's intense. He loses a tooth, believes with all his heart and puts his tooth under his pillow. His sister, a year or two older, isn't quite sure about the tooth fairy any more, but is open to the idea. Just to be sure, she goes to her mom and shows her the lost tooth. Still, she's not really sure her mom has anything to do with the whole process either. Which one gets the money the next morning, the one with strong, sincere faith in the tooth fairy or the one with wavering, hesitant faith in her mom?

It's not the strength or the sincerity of our faith that counts in the end. It's the object of our faith that matters most. Faith in an unreliable object is an unreliable faith. The point this passage makes for us today is this:

Faith in any system of works is ultimately faith in our unreliable selves. Trust Jesus instead.

The Galatian church was wavering in their commitment to Christ and beginning to trust in a works-based system of righteousness. Paul will explain to them and to us just why this is so inadequate and why they need to keep trusting in Jesus instead.

- I. The Experience of the Galatians 3:1-5
- II. The Example of Abraham 3:6-18
- III. The Purpose of the Law 3:19-25
- IV. The Results of Faith in Christ 3:26-29

I. The Experience of the Galatians 3:1-5

1:1 Faith in any system of works ignores the cross. Christ deserves the credit for saving us.

The word Paul uses here for **foolish** indicates a person who fails to exercise his or her powers of perception.

Thanks to the Word of God and the help of the Holy Spirit, the Christian believer has the ability to successfully evaluate the issues of life in the world. The problem is that too often we don't bother to think things through to the end. The Galatians problem was not lack of ability but lack of effort. Sad to say that is often the case with us.

1:2-5 Faith in any system of works ignores our need for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit needs to be the source of our good works. Otherwise they will never be good enough. We're trusting in ourselves when God is offering us His supernatural power.

- v.5 offers indirect evidence of the genuineness of miraculous works in Galatia.

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II. The Example of Abraham 3:6-18

1:6-9 God has always imputed righteousness on the basis of faith. To explain this to us, Paul takes us back to the story of Abraham, the father of faith and the father of Israel.

Gen 1-11 summary: Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel and division into the nations. We might call this the introductory section of the Bible. It sets the stage for the rest of this big, thick book.

Gen 12: God's calling of Abraham begins the story of redemption. In the midst of all the nations of the earth, God was going to single out one nation through which He would bring redemption to the whole human race.

Two passages in the story of Abraham: **Gen 12:1-7** and **15:1-6**

3:8 Paul mentions the Gentiles or the nations being justified by faith. God said that all the nations would be blessed in Abraham. How is that promise fulfilled? Paul brought this blessing to the people of Galatia by going out and taking the gospel to them.

We can continue that process of blessing. Whenever we reach out to others in the love of Christ we are fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. The nations are being blessed in Him. That's why we try to be an outreach-oriented church here in Indianapolis. We also try to have far-reaching missions focus to take the gospel beyond our own city into all the nations of the world.

Example: The Petersens served here in the church in Sunday school. Dan led a home fellowship. He also directly engaged the culture through his Blaster punk rock stuff. They've been serving in Scotland for several years now and are very likely going to plant a church. (I bring them up mostly because Krystiana is there now too!)

3:10 Here is a huge problem with works-based systems of righteousness. We always fall short of the requirements. We even fail to meet the standards that we ourselves set.

Example: I'm always going to be nice to people. (Except when I haven't slept well, have an upset stomach, a headache, or the people in question are particularly irritating.)

3:11 Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, which appears 3x in the NT:

Habakkuk 2:4 NKJV "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

3:14 Again, the blessing of Abraham comes upon all the nations. Anyone can receive the indwelling Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

3:17-18 Now Paul makes another important point: The promise to Abraham came before the law by 430 years. God didn't nullify the promise when He gave Israel the Law, did He? Of course not. It was never His intention to go back on His promise. So why did He give Israel the law? Funny you should ask, because now Paul gives us the answer.

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III. The Purpose of the Law 3:19-25

3:19 In hindsight, we can see that one big purpose for the law was this: To show us our sin. The law was added to the promise to make it clear why we need a Savior like Jesus Christ.

3:21 Remember what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Matt 26:36-44 NKJV ³⁶Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, *“Sit here while I go and pray over there.”* ³⁷And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸Then He said to them, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”*

³⁹He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*

⁴⁰Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, *“What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?”* ⁴¹Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, *“O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”* ⁴³And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

3:24-25 This should somehow be marked in your Bible so that you don't forget it. The law makes it clear why we need a Savior like Jesus Christ.

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IV. The Results of Faith in Christ 3:26-29

By faith we are brought into the family of God. We are now sons of God and heirs according to the promise. It doesn't matter what your social status is here on earth.

Conclusions

- The object of your faith is what counts, not the strength or the sincerity.
- Faith in any system of works ignores the cross. Christ deserves the credit for saving us.
- Faith in any system of works ignores our need for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit needs to be the source of our good works. Otherwise they will never be good enough.
- Faith in Jesus Christ fulfills God's promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing and that all the nations would be blessed in him.
- Faith in Jesus Christ brings us into God's family. We are blessed along with Abraham and now free to be a blessing to the world.

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