

# The Superiority of the Gospel

Lesson for October 22, 2023

## Unit II: Faith Triumphs, Law Falls Short

**Adult Topic:** All or Nothing at All

**Background Scripture:** Galatians 3:1-18

**Printed Text:** Galatians 3:1-14

**Key verse:** *“I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?”* (Galatians 3:2, NIV)

In 1859, the famous tight-rope walker Charles Blondin traveled to Niagara Falls. He stretched a three-inch wire over the gorge. There, suspended on this wire, he walked 1100 feet from one side to the other. He did this a number of times: blindfolded, in a sack, pushing a wheelbarrow, on stilts, sitting down midway while he cooked and ate an omelet and standing on a chair with only one chair leg on the rope.

But that’s not all. He also carried a man on his back over that tightrope. This must be one of the best examples of trust ever placed by one human in another. It’s either brave or stupid. Blondin carried his manager on his back from one side of the Falls to the other. I don’t care if it was his manager; that goes beyond an honest day’s work.

Imagine if halfway across the manager had said to Blondin, “Look, I appreciate that you’ve taken me this far, but I really don’t trust you anymore. I think I’ll do the rest myself. Let me down, and I’ll take it from here.” Can you imagine? He’d be a dead manager from that point on. Having been carried that far, why in the world would he think that he could get the rest of the way across by himself?

Darryl Dash

It sounds ridiculous, but that is the very situation that Paul addresses in this week’s lesson as he continues his discussion of faith and the law.

### Key terms

1. Curse (verse 10) – A prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one; a spell.
2. Foolish (verse 1) – Not having understanding; having or showing a lack of good sense, judgment, or discretion.
3. Promise (verse 14) – A declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified; a pledge.

## Lesson Background

"Galatians comes to grips with the question of what real Christian life is like. The answer can be characterized by one word, "liberty." The Christian is called to liberty in Jesus Christ. The cry of this epistle is that Christians might discover the liberty of the sons of God in accordance with all that God has planned for man in the way of freedom and enjoyment. Its aim is freedom of our human spirits to the utmost extent, restrained only as necessary for us to exist in harmony with the design of God. Therefore, this letter has been called the "Bill of Rights of the Christian Life," or the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty," the "Emancipation Proclamation" from all forms of legalism and bondage in the Christian experience." (Stedman)

Paul spends most of chapters 1 and 2 defending his ministry and message. After establishing his authority to speak to them, he shifts his focus to the Galatians. He is shocked that they have so quickly abandoned the gospel for another, false gospel preached by false teachers. They have left their first love. The problem, as Paul sees it, is they have been bewitched.

We're going to see three things in this passage.

- First: that the entire Christian life is based on faith, not performance
- Second: that this is the way it's always been
- Third: that there could be no other way

## Lesson in Depth

### I. The Connection to Christ (Galatians 3:1-5)

**O foolish Galatians!** The strong words were well deserved. Phillips even translated this, "*O you dear idiots of Galatia.*" In calling the Galatians **foolish**, Paul did not mean they were morally or mentally deficient (the ancient Greek word *moros* had that idea and was used by Jesus in parables such as in Matthew 7:26 and 25:1-13). Instead, Paul used the ancient Greek word *anoetos*, which had the idea of someone who *can* think but *fails* to use their power of perception.

The principles Paul referred to are things the Galatians knew, things they had been taught. The knowledge and understanding were there, but they were not using them.

**Who has bewitched you:** **Bewitched** has the idea that the Galatians were under some type of spell. Paul didn't mean this literally, but their thinking was so clouded – and so unbiblical – that it seemed that some kind of spell had been cast over them.

Barclay translates **bewitched** as *put the evil eye on*. The ancient Greeks were accustomed to and afraid of the idea that a spell could be cast upon them by an *evil eye*.

The evil eye was thought to work in the way a serpent could hypnotize its prey with its eyes. Once the victim looked into the evil eye, a spell could be cast. Therefore, the way to overcome the evil eye was simply not to look at it. In using this phrasing and the word picture of **bewitched**, Paul encouraged the Galatians to keep their eyes always and steadfastly upon Jesus.

It is wonderful to have a soft, tender heart before God. But some people have softer *heads* than hearts. Their minds are too accommodating to wrong, unbiblical ideas, and they don't think things through to see if they really are true or not according to the Bible. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity, even as a baby will stick *anything* into its mouth.

**Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified:** The idea behind **clearly portrayed** is something like "billboarded," to publicly display as in setting on a billboard. Paul wondered how the Galatians could have missed the message because he certainly made it clear enough to them.

When they left the message of Jesus and Him crucified, they left the message Paul preached. Paul's preaching was like setting up posters of Jesus all over town – if you saw anything, you saw Jesus.

When we see Jesus clearly before us, we won't be deceived. "If anything contrary to this comes before him, he does not timidly say, 'Everybody has a right to his opinion'; but he says, 'Yes, they may have a right to their opinion, and so have I to mine; and my opinion is that any opinion which takes away from the glory of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice is a detestable opinion.' Get the real atonement of Christ thoroughly into your soul, and you will not be bewitched."  
(Spurgeon)

**Before whose eyes:** Paul didn't mean that they literally saw the crucifixion of Jesus or even that they had a spiritual vision of it. He meant that the truth of Jesus and Him crucified and the greatness of His work for them was clearly laid out for them so clearly that they could *see* it. Actually, watching the death of Jesus on the cross might mean nothing. Hundreds, if not thousands, saw Jesus dying on the cross and most of them only mocked Him.

**This only I want to learn from you:** "Just tell me this," Paul said. **Did you receive the Spirit through the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Obviously, the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through simple faith. The Holy Spirit is not a prize earned through the **works of the law**.

It worked like this: A Gentile was told he must come under the Law of Moses or God would not bless him. This meant he must be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. So, he has the operation and as soon as the cut is made, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon him. Of course, this is not how it works. We receive the Holy Spirit by *faith* and not by coming under the works of the law.

**Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?** The Galatians were deceived into thinking that spiritual growth or maturity could be achieved through the works of the flesh, instead of a continued simple faith and abiding in Jesus. Another way to say Paul's message is like this: "You received the greatest gift – the Holy Spirit of God – by faith. Are you going on from there, not by faith, but by trusting in your own obedience under the Law of Moses?"

This lays out one of the fundamental differences between the principle of *law* and the principle of *grace*. Under *law*, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *earning and deserving*. Under *grace*, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *believing and receiving*. God deals with you under the covenant of *grace*; we should not respond on the principle of *law*.

**Are you so foolish?** This was indeed foolishness. This deception was cultivated by Satan to set our Christian life off-track. If he cannot stop us from being *saved* by faith, then he will attempt to hinder our *blessing* and *growth and maturity* by faith.

**Have you suffered so many things in vain:** Perhaps a better translation of this phrase is “Have you had such wonderful spiritual experiences, all to no purpose?” This may fit the context better. Paul wondered if all the gifts of the Spirit they had received would amount to no lasting value because they tried to walk by *law*, not by *faith*.

**He who supplies the Spirit to you:** Who supplied the Holy Spirit? Obviously, the Spirit was given as a gift from God.

**Does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** God supplied the Holy Spirit in response to **faith**. Miracles are wrought by **faith**. Yet the Galatians were deceived into thinking that real spiritual riches lay in pursuing God through a *works* relationship.

**By the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Paul repeated the phrase from Galatians 3:2 because he wanted to emphasize there was a choice to be made. Which will it be? Do you believe you will be blessed **by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith**? Will you *earn and deserve* your blessing from God, or will you *believe and receive* it?

This speaks to those who see *lack of blessing*. Why? Not from a lack of devotion, not because they haven't earned enough; but because they are not putting their faith, their joyful and confident expectation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This speaks to those who are *wonderfully blessed*. How? For them to be proud is to be *blind*. They have not earned their blessing, so they should not take pride in them. All the more they should look to Jesus and put their expectation in Him.

According to Warren Wiersbe, “The key to this section is in the word 'suffered' (v. 4), which can be translated 'experienced.' Paul asks, 'Have you experienced so many things in vain?' The argument from Christian experience was a wise one with which to begin, because Paul had been with them when they had trusted Christ. Of course, to argue from experience can be dangerous because experiences can be counterfeited, and they can be misunderstood. Subjective experience must be balanced with objective evidence because experiences can change, but truth never changes. Paul balances the subjective experience of the Galatian Christians with the objective teaching of the unchanging Word of God (vv. 6- 14).”

## II. A Noble Example (Galatians 3:6-10)

**Just as Abraham:** Among the Galatian Christians, the push towards a works-based relationship with God came from certain other Christians who were born as Jews and who claimed Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. Therefore, Paul used **Abraham** as an example of being right before God by **faith** and not by faith plus works.

“It mattered a great deal to the apostle that God saves people by grace, not on the grounds of their human achievement, and he found Abraham an excellent example of that truth.” (Morris)

**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness:** Paul here quoted from [Genesis 15:6](#). It simply shows that **righteousness** was **accounted** to Abraham because he **believed God**. It was *not* because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

[Genesis 15:1-6](#) shows that when Abraham put his trust in God, specifically in God’s promise to give him children that would eventually bring forth the Messiah, God credited this belief to Abraham’s account as righteousness. “Abraham was not justified merely because he believed that God would multiply his seed, but because he embraced the grace of God, trusting to the promised Mediator.” (Calvin)

There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we *accomplish* by our own efforts and righteousness *accounted* to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God’s righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: **Abraham believed God**.

**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness:** This quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#) is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith alone. It is the gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament ([Romans 4:3](#), [Romans 4:9-10](#), [Romans 4:22](#) and here in [Galatians 3:6](#)).

[Romans 4:9-10](#) makes much of the fact this righteousness was accounted to Abraham before he was *circumcised* ([Genesis 17](#)). No one could say Abraham was made righteous because of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abraham as righteous.

We should be careful to say that Abraham’s faith did not make him righteous. Abraham’s *God* made him righteous, by accounting his faith to him for righteousness. “His faith was not his righteousness, but God so rewarded his exercise of faith, as that upon it he reckoned (or imputed)... the righteousness of him in whom he believed.” (Poole)

**Accounted to him for righteousness:** Abraham’s experience shows that God *accounts* us as righteous, because of what Jesus did for us, as we receive what He did for us by faith.

If God **accounted** Abraham as righteous, then that is how Abraham should account himself. That was his standing before God, and God's accounting is not pretending. God does not account to us a pretended righteousness, but a real one in Jesus Christ.

**Believed God:** It wasn't that Abraham believed *in* God (as we usually speak of believing in God). Instead, it was that Abraham **believed God**. Those who only believe *in* God, in the sense that they believe He exists, are only as spiritual as demons are ([James 2:19](#)).

“*Believed*, of course, means more than that he accepted what God said as true (though, of course, he did that); it means that he trusted God.” (Morris)

Generally speaking, ancient Rabbis did not really admire Abraham's *faith*. They believed he was so loved by God because he was thought to have kept the law hundreds of years before it was given. For these and other reasons, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved *their* point. “Paul's emphasis on Abraham's faith must have come as a complete surprise to the Galatians.” (Morris)

“Faith in God constitutes the highest worship, the prime duty, the first obedience, and the foremost sacrifice. Without faith God forfeits His glory, wisdom, truth, and mercy in us. The first duty of man is to believe in God and to honor Him with his faith. Faith is truly the height of wisdom, the right kind of righteousness, the only real religion... Faith says to God: ‘I believe what you say.’” (Luther)

**Therefore know:** The emphasis is clear. Paul made an important point, and he wanted each one of his readers to understand it. “*Know* is imperative; Paul commands the Galatians to acquire this piece of knowledge.” (Morris)

**Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham:** Since Abraham was made righteous by **faith** and not by works, Abraham was therefore the father of everyone who believes God and is accounted righteous.

**Are sons of Abraham:** This was a strong rebuke to the Jewish Christians who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the law. They believed they were superior because they descended from Abraham and observed the law. Paul said that the most important link to Abraham was not the link of *genetics* and not the link of *works*, but it is the link of **faith**.

This would have been a shocking change of thinking for these particular opponents of Paul. They deeply believed that they had a standing before God because they were *genetically* descended from Abraham. At that time, some Jewish Rabbis taught that Abraham stood at the gates of Hell just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally slipped by. John the Baptist dealt with this same thinking when he said, *Do not think to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones* (Matthew 3:9). Paul knocked down their blind reliance on *genetic* relation to Abraham and showed that what really mattered was *faith in Jesus*.

It's the same today when people believe God accepts them because they come from a Christian family. God is a Father, not a grandfather; everyone must have their *own* faith in God.

**Are sons of Abraham:** This was a great comfort to the Gentile Christians who were regarded as “second class Christians” by others. Now they could know that they had a real, important link to Abraham and could consider themselves **sons of Abraham**.

Sadly, Christians have taken this glorious truth and misapplied it through the centuries. This has been a verse that many claim in support of *replacement theology* – the idea that God is *finished* with the people of Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group, and that the Church spiritually inherits all the promises made to Israel.

Replacement theology has done tremendous damage in the Church, providing the theological fuel for the fires of horrible persecution of the Jews. If Galatians 3:7 were the only verse in the Bible speaking to the issue, there might be a place for saying that the Church has completely replaced Israel. But we understand the Bible according to its entire message and allow one passage to give light to others.

All who put their faith in Jesus Christ **are sons of Abraham**; but Abraham has his *spiritual* sons and his *genetic* sons, and God has a plan and a place for both. Yet no one can deny that it is far more important to be a *spiritual* son of Abraham than a *genetic* son.

**And the Scripture:** Paul spoke from the Scriptures. He had already spoken from his personal experience and from the experience of the Galatian Christians themselves. But this passage is even more important, because it shows how Paul's teaching is correct according to the Bible itself.

It would have been just fine for Paul's opponents to say, “Experiences are just fine Paul, but show us from the Scriptures.” Paul was more than ready to take up the challenge.

**The Scripture, foreseeing... preached... saying:** Remarkably, Paul referred to the **Scriptures** virtually as a person who *foresees*, *preaches*, and *says*. This shows just how strongly Paul regarded the Bible as God's word. Paul believed that when the Scriptures spoke, God spoke.

**Foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith:** Paul observed that even back in Abraham's day it was clear that this blessing of righteousness by faith was intended for every nation, for Gentiles as well as Jews, because God pronounced that **in you all the nations shall be blessed** (Genesis 12:3).

The intention was to destroy the idea that a Gentile must first become a Jew before they could become a Christian. If that were necessary God would never have said this blessing would extend to every nation, because Gentiles would have had to become part of the *Israelite nation* to be saved.

The idea is that the gospel goes *out to the nations*, not that the nations come and assimilate into Israel.

**Those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham:** The *blessing* we receive with **believing Abraham** is not the blessing of fantastic wealth and power, though Abraham was extremely wealthy and powerful. The blessing is something far more precious: the blessing of a right standing with God through faith.

“The faith of the fathers was directed at the Christ who was to come, while ours rests in the Christ who has come.” (Luther)

“*They who are of faith* are those whose characteristic is faith; it is not that they sometimes have an impulse to believe, but rather that believing is their constant attitude; faith is characteristic of them.” (Morris)

**For as many as are of the works of the law:** Paul here addressed those who thought that their law-performance could give them a right standing before God.

The transition from believing Abraham (Galatians 3:9) to those who are **of the works of the law** had a purpose. “If even the great patriarch was accepted by God only because of his faith, then it follows that lesser mortals will not succeed in producing the good deeds that would allow them to be accepted before God.” (Morris)

“The hypocritical doers of the Law are those who seek to obtain a righteousness by a mechanical performance of good works while their hearts are far removed from God. They act like the foolish carpenter who starts with the roof when he builds a house.” (Luther)

**For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse:** The Christians from a Jewish background who believed Gentiles should still live under the Law of Moses thought that it was a path to *blessing*. Paul boldly declared that instead of blessing, living under **the works of the law** put them **under the curse**.

It isn't hard to see how these Christians believed that living under law brought blessing. They could read in the Old Testament many passages that supported this thinking. Psalm 119:1 says, *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!* Psalm 1:1-2 says, *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

We must understand *how* the Law can bring blessing. First, we see that the word *law* is used in two senses in the Bible. Sometimes it means “The Law of Moses, with all its commands, which a man must obey to be approved by God.” Sometimes it means “God’s Word” in a very general sense. Many times when the Old Testament speaks of the law, it speaks of it in the general sense of God’s Word to us. When Psalm 119:97 says *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*, the Psalmist meant more than just the Law of Moses; he meant all of God’s Word. Seeing this, we understand how the Bible is filled with praise for the law. Secondly, we are blessed when we keep the law because we are living according to the “instruction manual” for life. There is an inherent, built-in blessing in living the way God says we should live, in fulfilling the “manufacturer’s recommendation.”



When Paul said that **as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse**, he didn't mean that the law was bad or the Word of God is wrong. He simply meant that God never intended the law to be the way we find our approval before Him. He knew we could never keep the law, and so God instituted the system of *atonement sacrifice* along with the law. And the entire sacrificial system looked forward to what Jesus would accomplish on the cross for us.

**Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them:** To prove his point Scripturally Paul quoted from [Deuteronomy 27:26](#). The Old Testament itself shows us that if we do not keep **all things** in the law and actually **do them**, then we are under a curse.

The important words are **all** and **do**. For God to approve you on the basis of the law, you first have to **do** it. Not simply *know* it, not simply *love* it, not simply *teach* it, not simply *want* it, you must **do** it. Secondly, you have to do it **all**. Not some. Not just when you are over 18 or over 40. Not just more good than bad. Deuteronomy 27:26 specifically says that to be justified by the law, you must **do** it, and do it in **all things**.

**All** means a lot. It means that while some sins are worse than others are, there are no small sins before such a great God. "Jewish keepers of the law would overlook small transgressions. Paul would not." (Morris)

**Cursed is everyone:** Paul's point is heavy; it weighs us down with a curse. If you are under the works of the law, the only way you can stand approved and blessed before God by the law is to **do** it, and to do it **all**. If you don't, you are **cursed**.

**Cursed** is a word that sounds strange in our ears. Yet in the Bible, the idea of being **cursed** is important, and frightening – because it means being **cursed** by God. Not only **cursed** by our own bad choices, not only **cursed** by this wicked world, not only **cursed** by the Devil – but especially **cursed** by God. He is the one Person you don't want to be **cursed** by.

### III. Redemption from the Curse (Galatians 3:11-14)

**But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident:** Paul had already proven this point in the Scriptures by examining the life of Abraham (Galatians 3:5-9). Now he brought in another passage from the Old Testament, Habakkuk 2:4, which reminds us that the just live by **faith** and not by law.

The Jews themselves sensed that because none could keep the law perfectly, salvation could not come through keeping the law. This is why they placed such emphasis on their descent from Abraham, essentially trusting in Abraham's merits to save them because they sensed that their own merits could not.

**The just shall live by faith:** This brief statement from the prophet Habakkuk is one of the most important and most quoted Old Testament statements in the New Testament. Paul used it here to show that the **just live by faith**, not by law. Being under the law isn't the way to be found **just** before God; only living by faith is.

If you are found to be **just** – approved – before God, you have done it by a life of **faith**. If your life is all about living under the law, then God does not find you approved.

**The just shall live by faith:** Every word in Habakkuk 2:4 is important and God quotes it three times in the New Testament just to bring out the fullness of the meaning.

i. In Romans 1:17, when Paul quoted this same passage from Habakkuk 2:4, the emphasis was on *faith*: “The just shall live by **faith**.”

ii. In Hebrews 10:38, when the writer to the Hebrews quoted this same passage from Habakkuk 2:4, the emphasis was on *live*: “The just shall **live** by faith.”

Here in Galatians 3:11, when Paul quoted this passage from Habakkuk 2:4, the emphasis is on *just*: “The **just** shall live by faith.”

**Yet the law is not of faith:** Some might come back to Paul and say, “Look, I’ll do the best I can under the law and let faith cover the rest. God will look at my performance, my effort, and my good intentions and credit to me as righteousness. The important thing is that I am really trying.” Paul proved from the Old Testament itself that this simply isn’t good enough. No; the paths of approval by **the law** and **faith** don’t run together, because **the law is not of faith**.

**The man who does them shall live by them:** The quote from Leviticus 18:5 is clear. If you want to **live** by the law, you must *do* it. Not *try to do it*, not *intend to do it*, and not even *want to do it*. No, it is only **the man who does them** who **shall live by them**.

It is very easy to comfort ourselves with our good intentions. We all mean very well; but if we want to find our place before God by our works under the law, good intentions are never enough. A good effort isn’t enough. Only actual *performance* will do.

This passage from Leviticus 18:5 is another often-quoted principle from the Old Testament. Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:29) quoted it in his great prayer for Israel. The LORD Himself quoted it through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 20:11, 13, and 21). Paul also quotes it again in Romans 10:5).

The effect of Paul’s use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-12 is overwhelming. We understand that we don’t actually *do* the law. We understand that we don’t actually do *all* the law. And we understand that this put us under a *curse*. Galatians 3:10-12 is the bad news; now Paul begins to explain the good news.

**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law:** Because we didn’t actually do it and do it all, the law put us under a curse. But now Jesus **has redeemed us from the curse of the law**. **Redeemed** has the idea of “buying back” or “purchasing out of.” It isn’t just rescuing; it is paying a price to rescue. Jesus bought us out from under the **curse of the law**.

Simply put, in Jesus, we aren’t cursed anymore. Galatians 3:10-12 left us all under a curse, but we are not cursed anymore because Jesus bought us out from under the curse.

**Redemption** is an important idea. “Redemption points to the payment of a price that sets sinners free.” (Morris) **Redemption** came from the practices of ancient warfare. After a battle the victors would often capture some of the defeated. Among the defeated, the poorer ones would usually be sold as slaves, but the wealthy and important men, the men who mattered in their own country, were held to ransom. When the people in their homeland had raised the required price, they would pay it to the victors and the captives would be set free. The process was called redemption, and the price was called the ransom.

The image took root in other areas. When a slave had his freedom purchased – perhaps by a relative, perhaps by his own diligent work and saving – this was called “**redemption.**” Sometimes the transaction took place at a temple, and a record was carved in the wall so everyone would forever know that this former slave was now a redeemed, free man. Or, a man condemned to death might be set free by the paying of a price, and this was considered “redemption.” Most importantly, Jesus bought us out of defeat, out of slavery, and out of a death sentence to reign as kings and priests with Him forever.

**Having become a curse for us:** This explains *how* Jesus paid the price to rescue us. Jesus became cursed on our behalf; He stood in our place and took the curse we deserved.

It stops us in our tracks to understand that the price He paid to buy us out from under the **curse of the law** was the price of Himself. It didn’t just cost Jesus something, even something great – it cost Jesus Himself. We know that men cursed Jesus as He hung on the cross; but that compares nothing to how He was cursed by God the Father. He made Himself the target of the curse, and set those who believe outside the target.

“Paul does not say that Christ was made a curse for Himself. The accent is on the two words, ‘for us.’ Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor.” (Luther)

“Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ’s sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ’s sins or we shall perish forever.” (Luther)

**For it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”** *When* did Jesus pay this price? The principle of Deuteronomy 21:23 shows that Jesus received this curse upon Himself as He hung on the cross, fulfilling the Deuteronomy 21:23 promise of a curse to all who are not only executed but have their bodies publicly exposed to shame.

“This passage did not refer to crucifixion (which the Jews did not practice), but to the hanging on a tree or wooden post of the corpse of a criminal who had been executed. But in the New Testament times a cross was often called a tree and there is no doubting that that is what Paul has in mind here.” (Morris)

**Hangs on a tree:** In the thinking of ancient Israel, there was something worse than being put to death. Worse than that was to be put to death, and to have your corpse left in the open, exposed to shame, humiliation, and scavenging animals and birds. When it says **hangs on a tree**, it does not have the idea of being executed by strangulation; but of having the corpse “mounted” on a tree or other prominent place, to expose the executed one to the elements and supreme disgrace. iii. However, if anyone was executed and deemed worthy of such disgrace, the humiliation to his memory and his family must not be excessive. Deuteronomy 21:23 also says “*his body shall not remain overnight on the tree.*” This was a way of tempering even the most severe judgment with mercy. Significantly, Jesus fulfilled this also, being taken down from the cross before night had fully come (John 19:31-33).

**That the blessing of Abraham might come:** Jesus received this curse, which we deserved, and He did not, so that we could receive the *blessing of Abraham*, which He deserved and we did not. It would be enough if Jesus simply took away the curse we deserved. But He did far more than that; He also gave a **blessing** that we didn’t deserve.

**The blessing of Abraham** is what Paul already described in Galatians 3:8-9: the blessing of being justified before God by faith instead of works.

**The Gentiles in Christ Jesus:** This tells us to whom the **blessing of Abraham** comes. Paul didn’t mean that it *only* comes upon Gentiles, as if Jews were excluded, but that it comes also upon those **Gentiles in Christ Jesus**.

The phrase **in Christ Jesus** is important. The blessing doesn’t come *because* they are Gentiles, any more than the blessing of being right with God comes to Jewish people because they are Jews. It comes to all, Jew and Gentile alike, who are identified **in Christ Jesus** and not by their own attempts to justify themselves.

**Receive the promise of the Spirit through faith:** This means that this blessing is ours in Jesus on faith and not the principle of law. The promise is *received*, not *earned*.

## Lesson Summary

In summary, Galatians 3:1-14 teaches important lessons about the predominance of faith in Christ for justification and salvation, the unity of believers in Christ, the fulfillment of God's promises, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. It underscores the significance of grace and faith over legalistic works of the law.

1. **Faith vs. Works:** One of the central themes in this passage is the contrast between justification by faith and justification by works of the law. Paul emphasizes that it is faith in Christ that justifies and saves, not adherence to the Jewish law or any legalistic works.
2. **Justification by Faith:** Paul makes it clear that faith in Jesus Christ is the means by which individuals are justified and made righteous before God. This is a fundamental doctrine in Christian theology, emphasizing the importance of faith in Christ as the basis for salvation.

3. **Abraham's Faith:** Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate the principle of justification by faith. He highlights that Abraham's faith in God's promise was counted as righteousness. This demonstrates that faith has always been the means of salvation, even in the Old Testament.
4. **Inheritance through Promise:** The passage also teaches that the promise God made to Abraham extends to all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. This means that all who have faith in Christ become heirs to the promises of God.
5. **No Discrimination:** Paul emphasizes that in Christ, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. All believers are one in Christ Jesus, and this unity transcends social and cultural barriers.
6. **The Curse of the Law:** Paul speaks of the curse associated with the law, indicating that trying to earn salvation through the law brings a burden and condemnation. This underscores the need for faith in Christ as the means of redemption.
7. **Redemption from the Curse:** Through His death on the cross, Christ redeemed believers from the curse of the law. This emphasizes the importance of Christ's sacrifice as the means by which humanity is set free from sin and its consequences.
8. **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** Paul mentions the role of the Holy Spirit, who is received through faith. The Spirit empowers believers, helps them grow in faith, and enables them to live righteous lives.