

The Gospel in Galatians ***Old Testament Faith***

Lesson #5 for October 29, 2011

Scriptures: Galatians 3:1-14; Romans 1:2; 4:3; Genesis 15:6; 12:1-3; Leviticus 17:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

1. This lesson is about curses, substitutions, and salvation by faith alone. What do these ideas conjure up in your mind?
2. Read Galatians 3:1-5. Clearly, Paul was upset by the news he had received from Galatia. The Greek word in this passage sometimes translated as “foolish” is actually a word which means “mindless” which might more correctly be translated “dumb” or “stupid.” Why would those Galatian believers choose to do something that was mindless? Undoubtedly, the Judaizers were trying to convince them that their salvation was not complete without doing these additional things. Furthermore, our naturally selfish natures would love to accept the idea that we can somehow earn at least part of our way to heaven. Wouldn't that give us a basis to boast?
3. What is implied by the expression: “Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross”? (Galatians 3:1, *GNB*) Does that imply that an explanation of why Jesus had to die was the basis of Paul's gospel? The expression “clear description” is a translation of a word meaning “placarded” or “painted”—a word describing a very public proclamation. Paul was suggesting that he had portrayed to the Galatians as clearly as he possibly could the actual events of Christ's death and their implications. Does this imply that by turning away from Paul's view, they were rejecting Christ? Did they understand why He died?
4. Paul clearly suggested that at the beginning they had come to be Christians in a right way. Paul absolutely believed that the gospel he presented to them was the correct one! (Galatians 1:7-9) What was Paul's appeal? What was the Judaizer's appeal? Paul seemed to suggest that they had actually received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they accepted the gospel. In this passage, he was essentially asking: Having been through that experience and having understood at least partially why Jesus had to die, do you really want to go back to a works-based religion?
5. Peter slid back after the experience with Cornelius! Do we ever think we are good enough to be saved? Does God grade on the curve? When we finally realize that we are not able to fully do everything that God requires, do we give up? Or, do we humbly accept the help that God offers?
6. Do we sense in any significant degree the actual sufferings that Christ went through on the cross? We believe that He died the second death—the death of separation from God that results directly from sin. (Isaiah 59:2) He experienced what it meant to be separated from His Father by sin. The terror and pain of that experience was so bad that His physical pain was hardly felt. (*Desire of Ages* 753.1) Do we have any comprehension of what these words really mean?
7. When God first gave the sacrificial system outside the gates of the Garden of Eden, it was probably clear to Adam and Eve that the intention was to show that sin leads to death. How long do you think it took before people began to get the idea that if they had enough lambs to offer, they could sin more or less freely? How many of the people sacrificing lambs throughout the history of the Old Testament really understood what that was supposed to mean? By the time of Christ, they had turned the sacrifice of lambs into almost an indulgence system?
8. How was the question of substitution represented by the sacrificial system? A person's sins were “placed” on the head of the lamb, and then the lamb was sacrificed. Those sins were then “transferred” to the temple, where on the Day of Atonement they were placed on the head of the scapegoat and carried far away from the camp of Israel. That was a very concrete way to represent “substitution.” What did substitution mean there? Does it simply mean that Christ died in our place? Or, is there something more implied? Are our sins buried in the bottom of the sea? (Micah 7:19)

What about all of the sins of the “saints” that are described in the Bible? Did God go to the bottom of the sea and dig them out again? Will there need to be a massive burning of Bibles at the gates of the New Jerusalem to destroy those records? Is there a sense in which Christ’s righteousness is transferred to us? Is that illustrated in some way in the sacrificial system? Does the “righteousness” of the Lamb get transferred to the person?

9. We have suggested that the life and death of Christ give us a choice: We can agree to live a life patterned after His life, or we will die the death that results from sin as He died. So, how do we actually accept by faith the death of Christ on our behalf? How do we accept His gift of life?
10. So far in the letter to the Galatians, Paul had expressed his absolute confidence in the gospel he had presented to them. He made it clear that his gospel was approved and given by God Himself; and, furthermore, it was later accepted without change by the brethren in Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:1-10) He then proceeded to talk about the personal experience of the Galatians themselves. (Galatians 3:1-5)
11. Paul turned next to discuss the biblical or Old Testament basis to confirm his gospel. He focused on the story of Abraham and its partial fulfillment when the children of Israel came out of Egyptian slavery. God’s promise was fulfilled. The children of Israel had nothing to do with the plagues or the deliverance from Egypt. All they had to do was march out.
12. There is excellent evidence suggesting that Paul was the first or earliest writer of the New Testament. So, when he talked about evidence from Scripture, the only evidence he could have been talking about was the Old Testament.
13. In the very last letter that Paul wrote—2 Timothy—he said that “every inspired—that is, God-breathed—Scripture is profitable” for many things. The apostles and disciples repeatedly referred to the Old Testament to substantiate their beliefs. Is that a valid basis for belief? No doubt, Paul’s enemies were using Scripture. Paul did too!
14. Read Galatians 3:6-14. Paul was making reference to a number of passages in the Old Testament: Genesis 15:6; 12:3; Deuteronomy 21:23; 27:26; Habakkuk 2:4; and Leviticus 18:5. Why do you think Paul was making such extensive use of the Old Testament? Do you think that might be what the Judaizers had been doing?
15. Have we ever been tempted to think that our works might have something to do with our salvation? What do we mean when we say that we are saved by faith alone? Why is it important to recognize that our works cannot save us? Do we need to reorient our thinking?
16. If salvation is by faith alone, does faith have anything to do with evidence? Faith is a relationship. Does that have anything to do with logic or reason? Is it natural for humans to be selfish?
17. We live in a day and time when almost everything has to be proven. History seems to define truth as “tested hypotheses,” “statistical analyses,” etc. Do we have a hard time believing in Someone we cannot prove or disprove by scientific investigation?
18. Do you have a hard time believing the story of Abraham? Do you think that Abraham lived the life of faith? What about the times when he lied about his wife? Considering that there are real differences in culture, living circumstances, etc., can we learn anything from the life of Abraham that might help us to live better lives in our day? As you read the story of Abraham, what sticks out in your mind? His faith relationship to God? Or, his obedience? He left his homeland and his family to travel thousands of miles into an unknown land. Think about the facts that he was willing to be circumcised and he was willing even to sacrifice his son at God’s command! What kind of obedience was that?
19. Paul took the offensive by focusing on Abraham’s faith as opposed to his obedience or law-keeping. Do you think Abraham considered himself a friend of God? If you are not a friend of God, would you dare to say the following to Him?

“Surely you won’t kill the innocent with the guilty. That’s impossible! You can’t do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible. The judge of all the earth has to act justly.” (Genesis 18:25, *GNB*)

20. Read Genesis 15:6. What do these words mean? These words have been repeated a dozen times in Scripture concerning Abraham. What does it mean to count, reckon, or impute righteousness? Do we ever have righteousness credited to us because of our obedience? Is there a relationship between faith and obedience? Someone has suggested that faith works! We are not saved by works alone or by faith and works. But, it is still true that “faith works!”
21. Our lesson emphasizes that we are saved by what Christ has done **for** us. What about what the Holy Spirit is doing in us? Is that also good news? What happens when we study, pray, and meditate on the life of Jesus? Does it change us in some significant way? (*Great Controversy* 555)
22. How many times and in how many different ways did God revealed Himself to Abraham? Did Abraham get to know God’s voice? There were no Scriptures! How did he know for sure it wasn’t the Devil telling him to take his son out and sacrifice him? Based on modern ordinary thinking, would we suggest that Abraham did several very crazy things in response to God’s commands? Would you leave your home and travel to the other side of the world because God spoke to you? There are at least three things we can learn from Abraham’s faith:
 - 1) Faith is more than just a belief in God. (James 2:19) Clearly, Abraham had a personal relationship with the Divine. (See Genesis 18:25, for example) Are we open to God’s voice in our lives? In how many different ways does God speak to people? Can God speak through nature? Through impressions? Through Bible study? Through counsel from friends? Or even signs, dreams, or visions? Do God’s directions to us always seem rational? Has God ever directly communicated with you? Even before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, God had promised him that he would be the father of many nations and a blessing to many nations. How long did it take for that promise to be fulfilled? More than 25 years! What would you think at the age of 75, for example, if God had promised you that your descendants would be a blessing to all nations and you still did not have a son?
 - 2) Did God practice progressive revelation on Abraham? Could you call that present truth? Didn’t He come back again and again, each time giving a little more information? Could that be described as present truth? When God gives us a new revelation, does that nullify what He has said before? Or, does any new revelation have to agree with what God has said previously?
 - 3) When God finally said to Abraham, “I will come back next year at this time, and you will have a son,” what was Abraham’s response? (Genesis 18:1-15; Romans 9:9) Prior to that in Genesis 17:9-16, hadn’t God already set certain conditions on His covenant? Abraham not only questioned God’s covenant, he laughed! (Genesis 17:17) Abraham has a lot of failings spelled out on the pages of Scripture. Yet, he chose to believe God when God said astonishing things. And God called Abraham His friend. The final test before the onlooking universe was proof that they were real friends. Abraham trusted God, believing that anything God asked him to do was for a good reason.
23. It is significant to notice that God didn’t ask Abraham to promise anything. Four times God said, “I will do this,” or “I will do that.” (Genesis 12:1-3) The promises were completely one-sided. This is really an example of the “new” covenant. What is sometimes referred to as the old covenant took place between God and the children of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7) But, covenants that are based on God’s promises are real. What does God ask us to do on our side of this covenant relationship we call faith? Do we all get that kind of test?
24. There are those in modern Christianity who believe that there is an older dispensation and a newer dispensation. They believe that the older dispensation was some kind of righteousness by works as found in the Old Testament. The newer dispensation is righteousness by faith alone as found in the New Testament. Is that a valid analysis? Clearly, Paul believed that there was only one gospel. (Galatians 1:7-9)

25. If God does all the promising as in the new covenant, (Jeremiah 31:31-34) is that an example of cheap grace? God does not seem to require anything from us. Is that grace “cheap”? Or, “free”?
26. So often, we find human beings trying to bargain with God by promising all sorts of things. What kind of covenant is that? What about “foxhole” promises?
27. What would you do if you got a message from God in the middle of night to take your miracle son—the one through whom God had promised to raise up entire nations—three days journey into the wilderness to sacrifice him? Would you see a psychiatrist first?
28. The case of Abraham’s faith was clearly more than a one-time acceptance of God’s plan for him.
29. What do you think Paul’s friends—who were so proud of the law they were promoting—thought when they read Galatians 3:10? Did they in any way believe they were under a curse? Or, did they think they would be blessed because of their obedience?
30. What message do you get from reading Deuteronomy 27 and 28? Back at Mount Sinai, the children of Israel had promised to obey all of God’s commands. (Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7) After 40 years of experiences in the wilderness, had they not yet learned that their promises were not very reliable? Why did God ask them to make another promise in Deuteronomy 27:26; 28:1? They were very rapidly willing to claim the promises in Deuteronomy 28. Did they ever seriously consider that they might be due for the curses in Deuteronomy 27?
31. When obeying God, do we have the option of choosing and picking what we want to obey? Can we count on God to overlook a few mistakes here and there? Or, must we recognize that our best efforts will never accomplish what needs to be done?
32. In what sense did Christ deliver us from the curse of the law? (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21) Christ hung on the cross to demonstrate the natural results of sin. Isn’t that where we were supposed to be? Didn’t He take our place? Did He actually die the second death for us? Would it be correct to call that a substitution? Or, was it primarily a demonstration?
33. One of the little-known facts in the writings of Moses is that virtually all of the Ten Commandments are followed later in the writings of Moses with a death decree for those who break them. Are those death decrees still valid? Should we be stoned if we pick up sticks on the Sabbath? (Numbers 15:32-36) Are any of our sins intentional? (Numbers 15:30,31) Are we somehow “healed by His wounds”? Can we begin to fathom why the idea that the Messiah would come and die a cruel traitor’s death seemed unfathomable to Jews who believed the prophecies in the Old Testament? Surely, the Messiah could not be cursed! It was not His curse. It was our curse!
34. So, what really happens when we exercise faith? Is there an honest sense in which faith is a kind of leap? Is it only safe to leap if God has promised to catch us? Or, is it only safe to leap when the One who tells us to leap has gone over the path before us? Moving forward in the dark is only safe when you have a reliable Guide giving you instructions. It is never safe to leap in the dark with no guidance!
35. The terrible struggle that Christ went through on the cross—and even before that in the Garden of Gethsemane—is spelled out in considerable detail in the *Desire of Ages* (pages 753 and 756.3).
36. So, how did Christ gain the victory in the end? “He relied upon the evidence heretofore given Him.” Is that faith? Absolutely! It was the greatest exercise of faith in the history of the universe. Jesus followed the Father’s instructions all the way to the second death! Shouldn’t we be willing to trust God a little more than we do?

© 2011, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know. info@theox.org

Last Modified: October 2, 2011

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\Galatians\SS-5-Galatians-2011_10_29-2011_08_23-Fin+.wpd