

## Spirit and Flesh

“He seems like an interesting person,” said Nyles, leaving a long pause.

“Well that was an interesting statement,” replied Anthony as he was turning the lights out in the multimedia center. “What’s on your mind? Be honest.”

“I don’t mean any harm. I just wondered if he’s so active in the church, and if he seems to be so into the Scriptures, why does he wear a beard and such a long one at that?”

“A beard? Facial hair? That is what has you so bothered?” asked Anthony.

“And what about all the chains? It looks kind of worldly,” added Nyles. “It’s just our pastor has always taught us the importance of godliness and holiness in order to be saved. People think they are going to make it to heaven without being holy and righteous.”

“Brother LaMario has a tenacious faith in Christ,” smiled Anthony. “He accepted Christ as his Savior while he was in prison. I know it sounds like a cliché, but his is the real deal. Really, he’s not out for any show or recognition. He’s just himself. And that’s all God wants us to be. God called you to be you, and he called LaMario to be himself.”

“When we are in Christ, we take on His holiness and His righteousness,” Anthony continued. “We are all saved by faith in Christ and nothing else.”

**1.** *What misconceptions do people commonly have about how we are saved and go to heaven?*

**2.** *When the New Testament mentions salvation, what does that involve??*

**3.** *Why can we be saved only through faith in Jesus?*

## Faith in the Crucified Messiah

*Galatians 3:1-5, KJV*

3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

*Galatians 3:1-5, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>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? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? <sup>4</sup>Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? <sup>5</sup>So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?"

Paul addressed some questions to the "foolish Galatians" (vs. 1). He did not mean they were half-witted. Rather, he accused them of not using their God-given intelligence. They should have known better than to believe those Judaizers who told them they must follow Jewish laws. Some of the Galatians had been "bewitched," duped. Paul reminded them that they had heard him preach about Jesus' crucifixion and clearly preach its significance.

Next, Paul asked the Galatians if they received the Spirit by obeying the law. No, they received the Spirit after hearing about and trusting in Jesus for salvation. Paul further maintained that the Galatians began their life in Jesus by the Spirit. It would have been foolish for them to continue

by their own power. They were powerless to complete in their strength what the Spirit had started.

Although the Greek verb in verse 4 can imply pain or hardship (“suffered,” KJV), it appears here to have the basic meaning of “experienced” (NIV). Paul used it to depict the Galatians’ personal experience of salvation through faith in Christ. To Paul’s rhetorical question—“Have you experienced so much in vain?”—he adds, “if it really was in vain.” This shows that he hoped the Galatians would return to the true Gospel.

Paul repeated his question, this time with the word “miracles.” Paul asserted that God had given the Galatians His Spirit and worked miracles in their lives because they trusted in Christ, not because they obeyed the law.

**4.** *What did Paul regard as the basis for the Galatians’ salvation?*

**5.** *Upon what basis did the Galatians receive the Spirit?*

## **Abraham—A Case in Point**

*Galatians 3:6-9, KJV*

6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

*Galatians 3:6-9, NIV*

“So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

<sup>7</sup>Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” <sup>9</sup>So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul's opponents taught that Gentiles needed to be circumcised to become Abraham's children and participate in God's blessings. Paul countered that we are justified before God in the same way as Abraham, through faith. All who have faith are the children of Abraham. Even Gentiles, who are neither descended from Abraham nor are circumcised, can become Abraham's "children" through faith in Jesus.

God's initial plan was to include Gentiles in Abraham's family. Paul said that Scripture "foresaw" (vs. 8) God's justification of Gentiles and "announced the gospel" to Abraham. So, God preached the good news for Gentiles as early as Abraham's day, when God said "all nations" would be "blessed" through him (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

Jesus is Abraham's descendant. Through Jesus, the blessings God promised to Abraham, salvation and life in the Spirit, are distributed worldwide. Just as Abraham believed God's promise and was blessed, so are we.

**6.** *Who are the true "children of Abraham" (vs. 7)?*

**7.** *In what sense was the Gospel "announced . . . in advance to Abraham" (vs. 8)?*

## **Redeemed from the Curse of the Law**

*Galatians 3:10-14, KJV*

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

*Galatians 3:10-14, NIV*

<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." <sup>11</sup>Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

who does these things will live by them.”<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”<sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Paul stated that all who rely on the law to be justified are “under a curse” (vs. 10), and God regards them as guilty. Paul’s explanation for this claim is in Deuteronomy 27:26. It shows that people are mistaken to trust in the law for salvation since no one can perfectly keep the law. Paul declared that the law justifies no one and quoted Habakkuk 2:4, which says that the righteous live by faith.

Next, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5, which says that law-keeping is a matter of doing. The law is not based on faith, for it promises life only to those who perfectly heed it. As believers, apart from God’s grace, we are lost.

In verse 13, Paul explained how people are “redeemed” from the curse of the law. When Jesus hung on the cross, He took upon Himself the guilt connected with our sins. Deuteronomy 21:23 says that a person executed on a pole was under God’s curse. So, Jesus was under God’s curse because He hung on a wooden cross to die. There are three key outcomes. First, Jesus’ death frees us from the law’s curse. Second, the blessing God promised to Abraham is available to all believers. Third, God gives every believer His promised Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:14).

**8.** *Why does reliance on the law not lead to justification?*

**9.** *How might anyone be rescued from the “curse of the law” (vs. 13)?*

## A Moment to Always Remember

When Philip the Evangelist related the Gospel message to the Ethiopian eunuch, the eunuch immediately asked to be baptized (Acts 8). His conversion displays the power of the Gospel and how appealing Jesus is to those whose hearts are ready to receive the Son of God as their Lord and Savior.

The time we committed our lives to Jesus is the time we were born again and became a child of God. If you have not experienced that life change, however, uncertainty and doubt about the power of salvation in Jesus may keep you from embracing Jesus as your Messiah. You may question the truth about Jesus as related in the Gospels, you may question the idea that Jesus is the only path to God, or you may question whether you are deserving of His love. There are many reasons that you may have to deny God's grace, and none of them should be dismissed as unreasonable.

Nevertheless, if you open your heart and mind to God's Spirit and consider what Jesus has done and His character, those questions will subside, and His love's light will shine upon you. It is then that you can receive Jesus as your Savior and experience the moment of rebirth as a child of God.

"Salvation is found in no one else," declared Peter, speaking about Christ Jesus while filled with the Holy Spirit, "for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And just as Peter called his listeners to humbly turn to Jesus for salvation, so also, Scripture calls each of us to do the same. Those who turn to Jesus and dedicate their lives to Him will remember that time He changed their lives.

**10.** *What is your perception of Jesus?*

**11.** *Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If so, why is it a moment you will always remember?*

**12.** *If you have not received Him as Lord and Savior, what would change your mind about Him?*

## Saved!

When Paul preached the good news about Jesus to the Galatians, they welcomed his teachings. After he left, however, false teachers arrived and told them they must also follow the Jewish law if they were to be truly saved. Today, we can be assured of our salvation because of Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise that "if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

► *Complete the following statement with what you believe about Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you have not received salvation in Christ and wish to do so, this is your opportunity to confess your sins and ask for His forgiveness.*

*I believe Jesus is. . .*

### KEY VERSE

Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?  
—Galatians 3:2b, KJV

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?  
— Galatians 3:2b, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

**Week of October 23 through October 29**

**(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)**

**Mon.** Genesis 12:1-9—A Promise to Abram's Offspring.

**Tue.** 1 Peter 1:3-12—An Imperishable Inheritance.

**Wed.** James 2:1-7—Poor in the World, but Rich in Faith.

**Thu.** Psalm 16—The Lord Is My Portion.

**Fri.** Deuteronomy 32:1-14—God Is the Rock.

**Sat.** Hebrews 11:8-19—Heirs of God's Promise.

**Sun.** Galatians 3:23—4:7—Children of God.