

## Receiving the Holy Spirit

Apostle Paul: <sup>2</sup> *Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.* <sup>3</sup> *How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?* <sup>4</sup> *Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?* <sup>5</sup> *I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.*

<sup>6</sup> *In the same way, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”* <sup>7</sup> *The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.* <sup>8</sup> *What is more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this Good News to Abraham long ago when He said, “All nations will be blessed through you.”* <sup>9</sup> *So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.*

<sup>10</sup> *But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under His curse, for the Scriptures say, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.”* <sup>11</sup> *So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”* <sup>12</sup> *This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, “It is through obeying the law that a person has life.”* <sup>13</sup> *But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When He (Christ Jesus) was hung on the Cross, He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”* <sup>14</sup> *Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing He promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.*

Galatians 3:2-14 (NLT)

There is one living God, and He exists in three Persons – God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Spirit. This doctrine of one God that exists as three Persons is known as the Trinity, the Godhead, or the Triune God. God the Father is presently living on His throne (e.g. see Isaiah 6:1; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 4:2) and God’s Son Jesus is presently at the living God’s right hand (e.g., see Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33). The Spirit of God also known as the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost was sent directly from God the Father and His Son Jesus (e.g., see John 14:26; John 15:26). God the Father and His Son Jesus graciously poured out the blessings of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, and He is with all faithful believers of God and His Son Jesus – Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) (e.g., see John 4:24; Acts 2:33; Acts 10:45; Titus 3:6).

Both our salvation and sanctification are the work of God's transforming Holy Spirit (e.g., see John 3:3-8; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 19). Through faith in God the Father and His Son Christ Jesus, God's transforming Holy Spirit, who knows everyone's heart, cleanses our hearts of sin, graciously gives salvation, and comes to live inside our hearts (e.g., see Acts 10:34-48; Acts 15:8-11; Ephesians 1:13-14). The Old Testament prophets predicted the living God would bring forgiveness of sins, salvation, and His transforming Holy Spirit to everyone who genuinely calls upon the Name of the Lord (e.g. see Ezekiel 36:24-27; Joel 2:28-32; John 7:38-39). Only God's transforming Holy Spirit changes our hearts and guides us to the things that please God (e.g., see Romans 8:5-14; Romans 1:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22-23). It is impossible to obey and please God without God's transforming Holy Spirit empowering believers from within our hearts to obey Him (see 2 Corinthians 3).

In Galatians, some Jews were falsely teaching the Gentiles they had to accept the Mosaic Law and certain rituals such as circumcision to receive the Holy Spirit. However, the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3 reminded these Gentile Christians how they and everyone else receive salvation and God's Holy Spirit (see Galatians 3:1-2). The true and living God freely and graciously gives salvation and the power of His transforming Spirit to anyone through faith and acceptance of His Son Jesus and the Gospel message (Galatians 3:2, 5, 14; see also Acts 2:38-39; Acts 11:15-18; Romans 8:9-11; Romans 10:14-17; Ephesians 1:13-14). No one can purchase, earn, or deserve this gift of God (e.g., see Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 8:9-25). Everyone who looks to God through faith in His Son Jesus freely receives God's life and spiritual blessings (see Galatians 3:13-14).

The Holy Scriptures reveal that no one can receive God's transforming Spirit and power through one's human efforts such as keeping the Jewish laws and observing certain religious rituals, ceremonies, and festivals (Galatians 3:3, 5; see also Galatians 4:9-10). Instead, the true and living God graciously gives His salvation, the power of the Holy Spirit, and work miracles by hearing with faith and believing in God's Son Jesus as our Lord and Savior and accepting the Gospel message (Galatians 3:5; see also 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Next, the Apostle Paul compares believers' righteousness with Abraham's life as an example of how God accepts and declares one right with Him (righteousness) (see Galatians 3:1-9). God declared Abraham righteous and fit for heaven because of Abraham's faith in Him and acceptance of His good promises (Galatians 3:6; see also Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). In the same way, the Apostle Paul taught the Galatians that the real children of Abraham are those who live by wholehearted faith in God (see Galatians 3:7, 9). Abraham is the father of everyone – Jews and Gentiles – that believes in the true and living God (see John 8:33, 39, 53; Acts 7:2; Romans 4:11-12, 23-25). In essence, the Apostle Paul revealed that *faith* has always been the basis for a relationship with God and receiving His good promises.

Moreover, the Apostle Paul declared that the Old Testament looked forward to Jesus' coming when God would declare and credit everyone – Jews and Gentiles – with righteousness and in right standing with Him through faith in Him (Galatians 3:8; see also Hebrews 11:7). God announced this Good News to Abraham long ago when He said, “I will bless those in every nation who trust in Me as you do.” (Galatians 3:8, TLB, see also Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 22:18). So then, everyone who place their faith and trust in God and His Son Jesus share the same blessings Abraham received because of his faith (Galatians 3:9; see also Romans 4:16).

However, anyone who depends on the law and religious rituals to make them right with God are under His curse for the Holy Scriptures clearly say, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (Galatians 3:10, ESV; quoting Deuteronomy 27:26).

Consequently, no one can win God's grace and righteousness by trying to keep the law because God has said that the only way one can be right in His sight is by faith in Him (Galatians 3:11; see also Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 5:6). As the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk declared, “The man who finds life will find it through trusting God” (Galatians 3:11, TLB quoting Habakkuk 2:4). However, the law does not rest on faith but says, “It is through obeying the law that a person has life” (Galatians 3:12, NLT, quoting Leviticus 18:5).

However, Christ Jesus has purchased our freedom (redemption) and released everyone from the curse of the law by taking the curse for our wrongdoing upon Himself on Calvary's Cross (see Galatians 3:13; see also Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 4:5). So through faith in Christ Jesus, everyone can receive the blessing of Abraham, declaration of righteousness (justification), and God's transforming Holy Spirit (sanctification) (Galatians 3:14, 22, 24; see also Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:15-16; Ephesians 2:8-9). The true and living God gave His unconditional promises to Abraham and His Seed, Christ Jesus, to save and declare everyone righteous through wholehearted faith in Him and now also His Son, Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:15-18; see also Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:15).

One may ask, “what about the law?” The Apostle Paul is not degrading nor depreciating the Mosaic Law for he maintained that the Mosaic Law is good, holy, righteous, and spiritual (Galatians 3:19; see also Psalm 119; Romans 7:12, 14; 1 Timothy 1:8). The true and living God wrote the Mosaic Law – the Ten Commandments – with His finger (see Exodus 24:12; Exodus 31:18; Exodus 32:15-16; Exodus 34:1; Deuteronomy 9:10; Romans 8:3). However, the Apostle Paul reminds the Galatians that God added the Mosaic Law four hundred and thirty years (430) after declaring Abraham righteous through faith and acceptance in Him and His good promises (Galatians 3:17; see also Genesis 15:6). God gave Moses and the ancient Israelites His covenant—the

Ten Commandments—to reveal and teach what sin, wrong, and evil looks like in His holy eyes (Galatians 3:18-19, 24; see also Romans 3:20). The Mosaic Law reveals the nature and will of the living God, provides our daily wisdom, and acted as our guardian until the arrival of Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:24; see also Deuteronomy 4:6-8, 13-14).

The Apostle Paul teaches that the only way now to escape sin and guilt is through our faith in God's Son, Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:22, 24). Through our faith in Christ Jesus, God graciously adopts and unites believers—men, women, Jews, and Gentiles—equally into His family as His dearly loved children and forgives our sins (Galatians 3:26-28; see also Galatians 4:4-7; John 1:12-13). Even more, believers of Jesus become true descendants of Abraham, and all of God's promises given to Abraham also equally belong to faithful believers of God's Son, Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:29). Most important, believers of God and His Son Jesus become One with the Triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit (see John 17:21-23). Through our faith, God and His Son Jesus graciously sends believers the transforming Holy Spirit and power to live in believers' hearts, so they become more and more like God and holy (see 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, 17-18; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 4:4-7; Philippians 2:12-13). In essence, God and His Son Jesus live into believers' hearts by the Holy Spirit and empower believers to live holy and God-honoring lives (see Galatians 5:13-26).

As a side note, few expressions in the Holy Scriptures are more significant and more misunderstood than “law.” The Holy Scriptures apply the “law” to specific commandments, customs, legal judgments, collections of regulations and ordinances, the book of Deuteronomy (which means “second law”), the entire revelation at Mount Sinai, the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), and the Old Testament as a whole (e.g., see John 10:34; John 12:34; John 15:25; 1 Corinthians 14:21).. Maimonides, a Jewish rabbi, established that 613 commandments were scattered throughout the Pentateuch. Also, the New Testament recognizes other laws such as the natural laws (see Romans 1:26; Romans 2:14) and “the law of sin” that results in death (see Romans 7:23, 25; Romans 8:2).

God and Moses perceived obedience to the laws, not as a precondition to salvation, but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved. God did not reveal the law to the Israelites in Egypt and then tell them that as soon as they had measured up to this standard, He would rescue them. On the contrary, by God's grace alone through faith Moses and the ancient Israelites crossed the Red Sea to freedom (see Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). Thus, God never intended obedience to the Ten Commandments or any other law as the way of salvation but as a response to salvation already received. True biblical religion has always been a matter of wholehearted love, devotion, and obedience to God from our hearts (e.g. see Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6-10; Jeremiah 4:4; Jeremiah 24:7; Jeremiah 31:31-

34; Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Throughout Israel's history, the ancient Israelites corrupted the law by placing great value in external religious rituals and ceremonies while disregarding God's ethical and moral demands of mercy, justice, and fairness (e.g., see Isaiah 1:10-17; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8).

With His first coming, Christ Jesus brought many aspects of the Old Testament law to completion. In His person, Jesus ended the ceremonial laws and transformed these old covenant customs into new covenant realities (e.g., baptism; the Lord's Supper). However, the moral laws of the Old Testament remain in force. The moral commands of the Old Testament that Jesus declared continues is a wholehearted commitment of one's whole being to God and a genuine love for the well-being of others (e.g., see Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-37; John 13:34-35; Galatians 5:6). This teaching was the same viewpoint Moses developed in Deuteronomy, and the Apostle Paul continually taught (e.g., see Deuteronomy 5:6-21; Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Romans 13:8-14; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13; Colossians 3:14). The Apostle Paul continued Jesus' teaching that love is the most important virtue (e.g., see 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22).

Besides, we must recognize that many of the Apostle Paul's negative statements concerning the law occurred in contexts of debating with Judaizers the way of salvation for Gentiles (e.g., see Galatians 3). Salvation comes only by God's grace through faith in Him and His promises, which is precisely the way the Old Testament presents Israel's experience (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul's comments that apart from the Holy Spirit it is impossible to satisfy the demands of the law is not contrary to Moses but a clarification of what Moses had meant by the circumcision of the heart (e.g., see Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:29).

In summary, the glorious news of the Gospel is that through faith in Jesus and His sacrificial death God lifts the curse of sin and circumcises our hearts by His Holy Spirit. However, **Jesus' coming and sacrificial death do not mean that God has suspended His moral law, such as His Ten Commandments, as His moral commands are fundamental statements of God's moral will, and we must obey His moral commandments.** Instead, the law serves as a reflection of God's moral nature, will, and wisdom as well as the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable conduct (e.g., see Deuteronomy 4:6-8, 13-14; Psalm 119). Accordingly, those who fulfill the "Law of Christ" by loving God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves will fulfill the essence of the law and reflect holy living (see John 14:15, 21, 23-24; John 15:12, 17). **The Holy Scriptures speak with a single voice in calling on all people to respond to God's grace with wholehearted love for Him and self-sacrificing love for others** (e.g., see Matthew 7:12; Matthew 9:9-13).

## References

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