Old Testament Faith

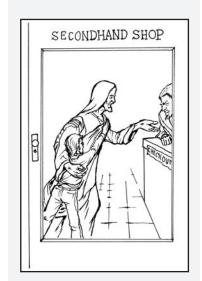**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 3:1–14; Romans 1:2; Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6.**

MEMORY VERSE: "Christ set us free from the curse of the law. He did it by becoming a curse for us. It is written, 'Everyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse' " (Galatians 3:13, NIrV).

We are twice the Lord's. He made us. But we ended up in the devil's secondhand shop. Then Jesus came and bought us at a terrible price: His precious blood.

"**A LITTLE BOY** made and painted a toy boat. But one day his beautiful boat was stolen. The boy was very upset. Soon after, he happened to pass a shop that sold used goods. He looked in the window and saw his boat. Happiness filled him. He ran inside and said to the shopkeeper, 'That is my boat!' 'No,' the shopkeeper said. 'It is mine. I bought it.' 'Yes,' the boy said, 'but it is mine, for I made it.' 'Well,' the shopkeeper said, 'I will sell it back to you for two dollars.' Two dollars was a lot of money for a boy who did not have a penny. But he wanted the boat so badly. So he cut lawns. He did chores. And soon he had the money.

"The boy ran down to the shop and bought the boat. He took the boat up in his arms. He hugged and kissed it. He said, 'You dear little boat. I love you. You are mine. You are mine twice. I made you. And now I have bought you.'

"The same is true with us. We are, in a way, twice the Lord's. He made us. But we ended up in the devil's secondhand shop. Then Jesus came. He bought us at a very high price. He did not pay silver or gold, but His precious blood. We are twice the Lord's because first He created us and then He saved us."—Adapted, William Moses Tidwell, *Pointed Illustrations* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1951), page 97.
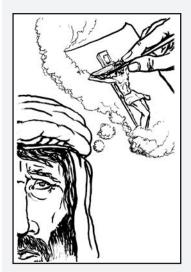
THE FOOLISH GALATIANS (Galatians 3:1–5)

Read Galatians 3:1–5. What is Paul saying to the Galatians? They started out right. They believed they were saved by faith alone. But then they made the mistake of believing they were saved by their works. In what way could we be in danger of falling into this same spiritual trap?

In verse 1, Paul calls the Galatians "foolish" (NIrV). Many modern Bible translations have tried to explain exactly what Paul means by "foolish." The actual word Paul uses in Greek is *anoetoi*. It is even stronger than "foolish." *Anoetoi* comes from the word in Greek for *mind* (*nous*). It means not using one's mind to think something through carefully. So Paul accuses the Galatians of not thinking. But Paul does not stop there. He wonders if some magician has cast a spell on them! A spell is a word or words believed to have magic power. Paul's choice of words here hints at the possibility that Satan may be the cause of how foolish the Galatians are being.

Paul is so confused about the Galatians' fall into wrong beliefs because they knew the truth. They knew that being saved comes by faith in Jesus. The Cross is at the center of this truth. There is no way the Galatians could have missed this point. The word translated as "clearly showed" (NIrV) in Galatians 3:1 means "painted" in Greek. It also means "to put up a sign in a public place for people to see." In Bible times, this word also was used to describe public announcements. So, Paul is saying that the Galatians have no excuse for falling away from the truth. For the gospel was at the center of Paul's preaching. He had "painted" a picture of Christ on the cross so clearly in their mind's eye (1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 2:2). But now they are turning away from it.

Paul then asks the Galatians some questions. How did they first become Christians? And why did God give them the gift of the Spirit? Did they do something to earn it? Of course not! Instead, God gave it to them because they believed what Christ did for them. So why did they now think they had to be saved by obeying the law?

Paul had "painted" a picture so clearly in their mind's eye of Christ on the cross.

Do you ever find yourself thinking, *I am a good Christian. I do not do this sin or that sin*? And then somehow you find yourself thinking you are good enough to be saved. What is wrong with this way of thinking?
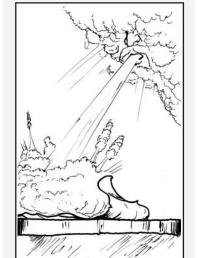
GROUNDED IN THE BIBLE (Galatians 3:6–8)

So far, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul takes a strong stand against those who attack his gospel. He points to the agreement reached in Jerusalem with the apostles (Galatians 2:1–10). Apostles were the leaders of the church. Paul also points to the experience that the Galatians had in the truth (Galatians 3:1–5). Now in Galatians 3:6, Paul turns to the Old Testament for the final proof of what he says.

Read Galatians 3:6–8. In these verses, Paul uses the word "Scripture" (NIrV). "Scripture" is another word for the Bible. So what part of the Bible does Paul mean when he uses the word "Scripture"? (Read also Romans 1:2; Romans 4:3; and Romans 9:17.)

Paul says that God has breathed life into all the Bible.

At the time Paul wrote his letter, there was no New Testament. So the Old Testament scriptures were very important to Paul's teachings. He often quotes from the Old Testament scriptures. He does not think of them as "dead" writings. Instead, Paul sees them as the living Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes, "God has breathed life into all Scripture" (NIrV). The wording "God has breathed" comes from the Greek word *theopneustos*. The first part of the word (*theo*) means "God." The second part of the word means "breathed." So, this word tells us that the Bible is "inspired." Inspired means "God-breathed," or given by God. Paul uses the Bible to show that Jesus is the Savior (Romans 1:2). He uses the Bible to teach. And he uses it to prove the truth of his teachings.

It is hard to count how many times Paul quotes the Old Testament. But Bible quotes are found everywhere in his letters, except his two shortest: Titus and Philemon.

Read Galatians 3:6–14. Which verses from the Old Testament does Paul quote? What does that tell us about how much power the Old Testament had to guide lives?

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At times, do you think that one part of the Bible is more "God-breathed" than other parts? Read again what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16. What does this verse teach us about the danger of this kind of thinking?

SET FREE FROM SIN AND MADE HOLY (Galatians 3:6)

In Galatians 3:6, Paul gives proof for his gospel by first turning to Abraham's story. Why does Paul do this?

Abraham was very important to the Jews. He was the father of the Jewish people. In Paul's time, Jews looked to Abraham as the example of what a true Jew should be. Many Jews believed Abraham was right with God because he obeyed. After all, Abraham left his homeland and family for God. He accepted circumcision. Circumcision is the custom of cutting off the skin at the end of the sex organ of a man or a boy. And Abraham was even willing to put his own son to death at God's command. What obedience!

Paul's enemies pointed to Abraham as the reason that circumcision was needed in order to be saved. In his letter, Paul also points to Abraham. But Paul points to him as an example of why we are saved by faith alone.

In Galatians 3:6, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. What does the verse mean when it says Abraham's faith was "credited [given] to him as righteousness [God's power to set sinners free from guilt or sin]" (NIV)? Read also Romans 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24.

The word "credited" (NIV) is an idea taken from the business world. It can mean "to place something to one's account." Paul tells us that what is placed to our "account" is God's holiness. It sets us free from guilt and sin. But what is the reason God credits us with His holy life? It cannot be because of obedience. Not even Abraham's obedience was enough to make him holy. The Bible says that God credited holiness to Abraham because of his faith.

The Bible is clear. Abraham was not made right with God because he obeyed the law. Instead, Abraham's obedience was a result of his being made right with God. So, Abraham did not do what he did to be made right with God. He did it because he already was right with God. In other words, being made right with God leads to obedience, not the other way around.

Paul tells us that God's holiness has been set to our account.

You are not made right with God by anything you do. You are made right with God only by what Christ has done for you. Why is that truth such good news? How can you learn to trust in it no matter what happens?

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
(Genesis 12:1–3)

In Galatians 3:8, Paul says that the gospel was preached to Abraham. And God was the one who preached it. But when did God preach the gospel to Abraham? To answer that question, Paul quotes Genesis 12:3. This verse is part of God's agreement with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. What do these verses tell us about the agreement God made with Abram [Abraham]?

God's special agreement was called a covenant. God's promises were at the center of His covenant with Abraham. God says to Abraham five times, "I will" (NIrV) do this or that. God's promises to Abraham are marvelous. Why? Because God makes all the promises. And Abraham promises nothing. Most people do not think of God as the One in the relationship who does everything. Instead, we usually promise we will serve Him. In return, we ask Him to do something for us. But that is just another form of trying to be saved by your own efforts. God did not ask Abraham to promise anything. He asked Abraham only to accept His promises by faith. Of course, that was not an easy thing to do. Why? Because Abraham had to learn to trust completely in God and not in himself. (Read Genesis 22.) Abraham's story shows us that the gospel is about being saved by faith.

Some think that the Bible teaches two ways of being saved. They say the Old Testament teaches that people were saved by obeying the law. But that way of being saved did not work. So, they say God got rid of the law. Then He made a new way of being saved. The new way was by faith. But this thinking is false in every way. Paul says so himself in Galatians 1:7. There is only one gospel.

What other Old Testament examples can you find that show we are saved by faith? (Read Leviticus 17:11; Psalm 32:1–5; 2 Samuel 12:1–13; and Zechariah 3:1–4.)

People often talk of "cheap grace." Grace is God's gift of forgiveness, mercy, and power over sin. So, cheap grace is a wrong use of words. Grace is free. But it is not cheap. We ruin the idea of grace when we (1) think we can add our own works to it or (2) use it as an excuse to sin. How do we avoid either of these two traps?

Abraham's story shows us that the gospel is about being saved by faith.

BOUGHT BACK BY GOD FROM A CURSE
(Galatians 3:13)

Paul's attackers were no doubt shocked by his strong words in Galatians 3:10. They did not think that they were under a curse. They thought they would be blessed for obeying the law. But Paul leaves no room for doubt: "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' " (NIV).

Paul shows the disagreement between two completely different ideas: (1) being saved by faith and (2) being saved by works. The special blessings and the curses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 are very clear. Those who obeyed were blessed. Those who disobeyed were cursed. So, for example, suppose a person wanted to be saved by obeying the law. Then he or she would need to obey the whole law. We are not free to pick and choose which laws we want to follow. And we should not think that God will overlook a few mistakes here and there. Being saved by the law means you obey all of it or none of it.
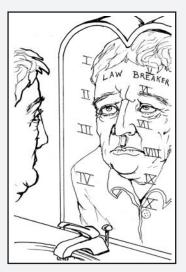
Being saved by the law is bad news for everyone. Why? Because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV). We can try hard, then, to be good. But the law shows we are lawbreakers.

Read Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How did Christ set us free from the curse of the law?

The wording "set us free" (Galatians 3:13, NIrV) is translated as "redeemed" in the NIV. The word "redeem" means "to buy back." It was used to mean the price paid to set hostages or slaves free. Jesus paid the price to set us free from the curse of the law. The curse of the law is death. Sin cost God the life of His Son (John 3:16). Jesus took our sins upon Himself (1 Corinthians 6:20). He suffered the full curse of sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul points to Deuteronomy 21:23 as proof. The Jews believed a person whose dead body hung upon a tree was under God's curse. Jesus' death on the cross was seen as an example of this curse (Acts 5:30; 1 Peter 2:24).

So it is no surprise that the cross caused some Jews to stumble in their faith. They could not understand why the Savior was cursed by God. But the Savior's being cursed was exactly God's plan. Yes, the Messiah took a curse upon Himself. But it was not His own curse—it was ours.

We can try hard to be good. But the law shows we are lawbreakers.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: "Christ was our Substitute. The sins of us all were laid upon Him. He was numbered with sinners in order to redeem us from the curse of the law. The guilt of all humans pressed upon His heart. The anger of God against sin filled the soul of His Son with fear and worry. All His life, Christ told a fallen world the good news of their heavenly Father's mercy and forgiving love. The main topic of Christ's preaching was how even the worst sinner could be saved. But now the terrible weight of guilt prevents Him from seeing the Father's forgiving face. And the Savior's heart is pierced with a sorrow that cannot fully be understood by humans. So great was this suffering that Christ hardly felt His physical pain."—Adapted, Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages,* page 753.
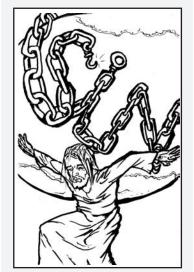
"Martin Luther was a church Reformer. [A reformer is someone who works to change things for the better.] Luther now entered his work of reform with boldness. He stood strong for the truth. He warned the people about how much God hates sin. He taught them that it is impossible for humans by their own works to be free of guilt or escape sin's punishment. Nothing but sorrow for sin and faith in Christ can save the sinner. The forgiveness and mercy of Christ cannot be bought. It is a free gift. Luther told people not to buy their forgiveness from the priests. Instead, they were to look in faith to a risen Savior."—Adapted, Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* page 129.

"Christ was our Substitute. The sins of us all were laid upon Him."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1 Even today in our own church, some people still have a hard time believing they are saved by faith alone. Why do you think they find it so hard to believe?

2 Paul spoke very strong words against the false idea that we are saved by works. What does Paul's defense of the truth teach us about how important what we believe is? Why should we take a strong stand against false teachings and practices in our church?

SUMMARY: From the beginning of our Christian life until the end, we are saved by faith in Christ alone. Faith in God's promises made Abraham right with God. And God counted him as holy. That same gift of being made right with God is offered to anyone today who has the faith of Abraham. The only reason we are not punished for our mistakes is because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross.