

Paul has shown us that Abraham was justified only by faith in the promise concerning Jesus (3:6–9). Now he puts to us another aspect of the matter.

1. The Law can't justify us – it can only curse us!

- The law can't deal with 'conscience'

- No one can keep the law

- The tenth commandment stirs up our 'flesh'

2. Habakkuk pointed to faith as the way to receive life

- The way to receive life

- True obedience follows the gift of a new life

- This new life is given by the Holy Spirit to those who are righteous by faith

1. **Another reason why we cannot be justified by the Mosaic law is that the law can only curse us!** We who have trusted Jesus are delivered from its curse forever. ^{¶1} It is faith that brings God's blessing. *'For every person who relies on works of the law is under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in doing all the things written in the Book of the Law"'*. ^{¶2} The law requires obedience! The only 'forgiveness' that it brought was ceremonial and symbolic. If you sinned against the tabernacle system of worship, you could be 'forgiven' but that kind of 'forgiveness' only meant you could live within the camp of Israel again. For anything serious there was no way of forgiveness. The worshipper could never be perfectly happy in his conscience. He always had a sense of guilt about anything serious, so long as he or she was looking at the Mosaic law. It was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. The law demanded total obedience and cursed disobedience. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 (and adds the word 'all' from such verses as Deuteronomy 28:1).

Paul takes it for granted that no one can keep the law. It may be kept externally, in a way sufficient to give respectability before others. In this way Paul was 'blameless' in keeping the law. ^{¶1} But when he tried keeping the tenth commandment he found it could not be done. The tenth commandment, 'You shall not covet' or 'You shall not desire' actually rouses the 'flesh' to all sorts of wrong desires. The sinful side of our nature gets stirred up by the law. Resentment and bitterness are aroused against God when we try to live under the law. So we fail to keep the law and we come under its curse.

2. **The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk pointed to faith as the way to receive life.** *'But it is obvious that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous person will live by faith"'*, says Paul. ^{¶1} The law required obedience, but that does not help us since no one comes even close to being truly obedient. Only Pharisees think they are obedient to the law, and they are strangely blind to what they really are like in the secret aspects of their life. They can be trying to murder someone and yet be proud of their obedience to the law (as happened in John 18:28)! Jesus told them, 'You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil'. ^{¶2} They totally failed to be just towards others or to love God. ^{¶3} True obedience comes after we come alive to God, and we only become truly responsive to God after we have been accepted and given new life.

When Habakkuk says, 'The righteous shall live by faith' it is an echo of Genesis 15:6. It is by faith that the righteous man is righteous in the first place. Habakkuk 2:4 echoes the words of Genesis 15:6, and Genesis 15:6 tells us of how Abraham became righteous before God. 'Abraham believed God and **that** [his believing on its own] was reckoned to him for righteousness'. Habakkuk picks up from Genesis 15:6 and goes a step further. The believer comes alive. He has spiritual energy flowing in him by his faith in Jesus. When Paul (following Habakkuk) says, 'The righteous shall **live** by faith', he is thinking about the new life given to us by the Holy Spirit. When we are right with God we are open to experience 'life'. We have the life of God in our soul, sensitivity towards God, desire and energy to serve Him, ability to hear His voice and understand His word. We are alive!

The Mosaic law was altogether different. Paul says, *'The righteous person will live by faith'* ^{¶1}, and *the law is not based on faith, but rather "The one who does them shall live by them"'*. ^{¶2} The law did not call for faith; it called for obedience. The word 'believe' does not occur anywhere in the Mosaic law itself. There are a few references to believing between the time when Israel was at Sinai and the sermons of Moses forty years later ^{¶3} ^{¶4} ^{¶5},

^{¶1} 3:10–14
^{¶2} 3:10

^{¶1} see
Philippians
3:6

^{¶1} 3:11
^{¶2} Luke
11:39
^{¶3} Luke
11:42

^{¶1} 3:11
^{¶2} 3:12
^{¶3} Exodus
19:9
^{¶4} Numbers
14:11

3. The Law is not based on faith

3. but none of them come in the law itself. You could be obedient externally and in the view of others who were looking at you. This did not require faith. Paul says he reached this level of righteousness even when he was unconverted. Saul of Tarsus reckoned he was blameless by the standards of the law. ^{¶1} The law was designed to control unconverted and unregenerate people within Israel. The law did not even mention faith!

¶5
Deuteronomy 1:32
¶6
Philippians 3:6

4. Israel and the Gentiles

- Jews released from the curse of the law
- The blessing of Abraham to the gentiles
- Jesus a sacrifice to all
- A great price
- Removal of the law – away open for the gentiles to join the people of God

4. Christ has redeemed Israel from the law and opened the way up for gentiles to join the people of God. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"*. ^{¶1} The law could only curse us but Christ took the curse away by taking it upon Himself. Christ 'redeemed' us. The word means 'bought our release by the payment of a price'. Paul is specially thinking of Jews. He uses the word 'we' in the same way in which he used it in Galatians 2:15. 'Christ redeemed us . . . The purpose is that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the **Gentiles** ...'. The law could only curse us Jews, says Paul, but Christ took the curse away by taking it upon Himself. Gentiles were not under the law and so did not need redemption from it (except that many gentiles admired the law and so did put themselves under it!). Jews sin against the law. Gentiles sin against conscience. But when Christ died to save Israel at the same time He saved the whole world. When He redeemed Jews from the curse of the law the same sacrifice for sin was a sacrifice for everyone whether under the law or not.

¶1 3:13

The word 'redeem' suggests that salvation from the law could come only by the payment of a great price. The price was Christ's death. He redeemed 'us' (says Paul) 'by becoming a curse for us'. His death was substituted in the place of those who had broken the law of God.

Jesus – by His sin-bearing, curse-bearing, death upon the cross – opened the way for gentiles to come into the people of God. Mosaic law prevented gentiles from joining God's Israel. By His death upon the cross Jesus redeemed any **Jewish** believer from the law – and therefore took the law away altogether. The removal of the law made it possible for gentiles to believe in Jesus and join the people of God. Paul spells this out in detail in Ephesians 2:11–22, but there is a hint of it even here.

5. The Gift of the Spirit

- Proof of God's acceptance

5. The seal of gentile salvation is the gift of the Spirit. *The purpose [of the curse-bearing that took place on the cross] is that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith*. ^{¶1} When the way was opened for gentiles to believe in Christ (because a sin-bearing atonement had been made), the proof that they were accepted by God is they came into the experience of the Holy Spirit. The worldwide 'blessing of Abraham' was in fact the experience of the Holy Spirit.

¶1 3:14



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