

Galatians 3:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Paul reduces his argument to a single devastating question. 'This only' (touto monon, τοῦτο μόνον) strips away all complexity—answer this one thing. The verb 'received' (elabete, ἐλάβετε) is aorist, pointing to their definitive conversion experience when they received the Holy Spirit.

'The works of the law' (ex ergōn nomou, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) versus 'the hearing of faith' (ex akoēs pisteōs, ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως)—two mutually exclusive sources. The genitive pisteōs could mean 'the message that calls for faith' or 'the hearing that produces faith,' both true. Paul appeals to their undeniable experience: they received the Spirit when they believed the gospel, not when they performed Law-works. This experiential argument demolishes legalism—the Spirit came through faith alone.

The question anticipates only one answer. Their reception of the Spirit, likely marked by charismatic phenomena (Acts 14:3), authenticated the gospel of grace Paul preached. To now require Law-keeping contradicts the Spirit's own testimony to faith-righteousness.

Historical Context

The Galatian Christians' reception of the Holy Spirit at conversion (likely accompanied by miraculous signs per Acts 14:3) was undeniable evidence that God accepted them through faith alone, without requiring circumcision or Torah observance. This same argument would be decisive at the Jerusalem Council, where Peter appeals to the Spirit's falling on Cornelius as proof God accepts uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 15:8). Paul's logic: if God gave the Spirit to begin the Christian life by faith, why would He require works to continue it?

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Can you identify the moment you received the Holy Spirit? What role did your works play versus God's grace through faith?
2. How does the Spirit's presence in your life provide ongoing evidence that you are justified by faith, not works?
3. In what areas might you be trying to 'maintain' your salvation through religious performance rather than continuing in faith as you began?

Interlinear Text

τοῦτο	μόνον	θέλω	μαθεῖν	ἀφ'	ὑμῶν·	ἐξ	ἔργων	νόμου
This	only	would	I learn	of	you	by	the works	of the law
G5124	G3440	G2309	G3129	G575	G5216	G1537	G2041	G3551
τὸ	πνεῦμα	έλάβετε	ἢ	ἐξ	ἀκοῆς	πίστεως		
G3588	the Spirit	Received ye	or	by	the hearing	of faith		
	G4151	G2983	G2228	G1537	G189		G4102	

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 3:14 (Faith): That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Acts 15:8 (Spirit): And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

Galatians 3:5 (Faith): 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?

Hebrews 2:4 (Spirit): God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Acts 8:15 (Spirit): Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

Acts 2:38 (Spirit): Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.