

Galatians Chapter 3

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Date: 10 May 2020

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- [0 : 00] If I was to sum up the problem of the Galatians in one word, it would be this, legalism. Now, what's legalism? Legalism is saying that in some way I need to contribute to my salvation by my actions, by things that I do.
- I need to work my way towards God. I need to earn his favour. And they, although they'd been saved by grace, they knew that it was the cross of Jesus that had saved them.
- Paul says this to them in verse three. Are you so foolish after beginning by means of the spirit? Are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? And so they'd started well. They'd understood the gospel.
- But false teachers had come in amongst them. And they were called Judaizers. And they had tried to say, look, if you want to be a true follower of God, if you want to be a top disciple, a top follower of God, then you need to follow these laws that God laid out in the Old Testament.
- You need to do these things and then you'll have favour with God. Then you will be a true Christian. Now, what's the problem with this way of thinking? Well, we're going to look through, we're going to delve into this text this evening.
- [1 : 16] And we're going to, it's going to jump a lot back to the Old Testament and a lot of the mindset of the Jews, what the law meant and what the law means to us today.
- But really, the problem is this. If you're saying that I need to do things on top of the finished work of Christ on the cross, then you're taking away from God and his glory.
- You're saying that in some way you have contributed to your salvation. In some way it's up to me. Now, that's completely against the thinking of the New Testament.
- It's completely against the thinking of the gospel. And actually, Paul, he reserves the strongest language for the church of Galatia. We see in verse one, he says, You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?
- He says, it's like someone's put a spell on you. You know, how can you be such an idiot to think this? You know, you began well, you began by the Spirit. Now are you going to finish by your own works, by works of the flesh?
- [2 : 17] In chapter five, verse 12, Paul speaks about those who had caused them to stumble in this way, those who had brought them into this false way of thinking.
- And he says, I wish you would emasculate yourselves. Now, you can't get much stronger than that. Paul is at his harshest when speaking to this idea of legalism.
- And actually, as we've been going through Luke, we see the same thing with Jesus. On the sinner, you think of the woman at the well or the woman caught in adultery. Jesus is so gentle.
- You know, he tells them to repent, but he does it with such gentleness. And actually, those who are in blatant sin, we know that we're wrong. We know that we need help. But it's those of us who, and we're all prone to this, when we think that somehow, you know, we've earned God's favor.

We've earned favor with the world, with the church, with God. When we think we've earned something ourselves, then that immediately causes pride within us. And that's what this legalism does.

[3 : 21] And that's why Jesus was harshest with the Pharisees. Because they thought they were right with God. Because of their race, because of their religion, because of their works. But actually, the Bible is clear.

We're saved by faith. We're saved by trusting in God, not trusting in our own works. And actually, that was true of the Old Testament, as we'll see later on. And so legalism, it causes pride within us.

And inevitably, it causes hypocrisy. It causes pride because we think we've earned something ourselves. It causes us to look down on those we think aren't doing as well as us.

And inevitably, because none of us can actually measure up to the standard that we set ourselves. We either deceive ourselves or we fake it. And that leads to hypocrisy.

And actually, we saw that in the last chapter with Peter. Although Peter knew that we no longer have to follow these rules, these laws of the Old Testament.

[4 : 28] When the Jews came from, the Jewish believers came from Jerusalem, he went completely the opposite way. And he started only eating with the Jews.

He started separating himself from the Gentiles. And that was all appearance. That was all hypocrisy. But that's what legalism does to us. It causes us to look down on others.

And it causes pride to well up within us. Well, that's one extreme. The other extreme of legalism, which is what the law should do to us, is inevitably it causes such a pressure that we cry out to God and we say, I can't do this.

I need you. And that's what the law was there for. So we read in verse 12 and 13. And we'll start in verse 10. 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 this book of the law. Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God because the righteous will live by faith.

[5 : 39] And the law is based not is not based on faith. On the contrary, it says the person who does these things will live by them. And so what's that saying?

Well, it's saying if you're going to be saved by the law, by following this law of the Old Testament, then you have to follow every single rule. You have to follow the whole of it or none of it at all.

If you fail in one part, then you've fallen short. And clearly, that's a burden that no one can bear. That's a burden that no one can carry. And that's why hypocrisy is so rife.

It goes hand in hand with legalism. And so the law, legalism, it brings a curse and it brings us to the end of ourselves.

It leads to helplessness, or at least it should. So if that's true, how was anyone saved in the Old Testament? And it's important to understand this.

[6 : 42] If we're going to understand, you know, the books of the Old Testament, if we're going to understand the Bibles, this chapter actually sheds a lot of light on the Old Testament, which is helpful for us to understand. And actually, long before the law was put in place, before Moses, there was Abraham.

And Abraham was the first Jew, the first Israelite. And it was from his to his family and to Abraham that the promise, the promises of the Jewish nation were told.

They were told to him. And how does it say that Abraham was saved? How was he justified before God? Where was his righteousness? Well, it says this in verse, starting in verse six.

So also, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So it wasn't that Abraham followed all these laws, all these rules that God had set in place and therefore God accepted him.

No, but even Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith, it says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. So it was Abraham's trust in God that brought his right standing before God.

[7 : 56] And that's the same for us today. And actually, it was the same for the Jews throughout the Old Testament. So we continue. Verse seven. Understand then that those who are faith are children of Abraham.

Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham. All nations will be blessed through you. So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Then it goes on to that section we just read. Those who rely on the works of law are under a curse. They're cursed. They can't live up to that. So why was the law put in place?

And what was the law about? What was its purpose? You know, if the law could never save anyone, then why did God send Moses? And why did he give the law to the Jewish nation?

Well, there's some clues in this chapter. We look in verse 21 and 22. It says this. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?

[9 : 04] And so Paul, he's getting in there. He knows what the Galatians are going to ask. And then he says, absolutely not. For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

But scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

And so what's he saying? Well, in one sense, he's saying the scripture locked up everything under the control of sin. And so what did the law do? The law set this standard, this perfect standard, which, you know, God's standard is perfection.

And that's why we all fall short of it. But what did the law do? It gave us this perfect set of rules, which no one could follow, and which shed light on our own shortcomings.

It shed light on their sin. And it sheds light on our sin when we read the word of God. And we realize, actually, we've all fallen short at some point, and we all fall short every day.

[10 : 18] So that's one thing the law did. What else did the law do? Well, it pointed to the lawgiver, and it pointed to the one who was perfect.

And that is God. That is Christ. The law showed us that there's a standard that we couldn't follow. And in so doing, it causes us to come to the end of ourselves, and we have to trust.

We have to trust in something outside of ourselves. We have to trust in God. And it continues, verse 23. Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

So the law was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So what does it mean by this idea of the guardian?

Well, in a sense, the law kept the Israelites from the opposite to legalism, which is antinomianism, which is doing away with any rules, any law. And so it kept them in one sense on the right track, although they could never truly obey it.

[11 : 36] And it also showed them that they couldn't follow it. They couldn't obey it. But actually, they were all saved by faith along with Abraham, just as we are. And ultimately, all of these things in the Old Testament, they all point to Christ.

And so in the law, you'd sacrifice a lamb to take away your sin. But that was all pointing to the ultimate sacrifice, which was Christ.

He was the one on which our sins, our shortcomings of the law would be placed upon. And so we're going to come now to the good news.

If that's the bad news, if that shows our sinful state, our helpless state, what is the good news? We're back to the idea of the curse, the sin and the law.

The law brings a curse. And verse 13, it says this, And so, when Christ hung on the tree, he took the curse upon himself.

[13 : 09] And so instead of us being cursed, that curse, which was on us because of our inadequacy to follow God, to follow his law, to follow his rules, that curse was placed on Christ.

And if we trust in him, rather than trust in ourselves, if we trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross, then our sin, the curse for our sin, is accounted to Christ.

And we get Christ's righteousness. And so salvation is not of ourselves. It's 100% from God. It's 100% from Christ. It's been finished on the cross.

And it goes on to say, to speak of the promises made to Abraham. And it says in verse 16, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

And so speaking of these promises to Abraham about the nation of Israel, that they would receive a land, that they would be a great people, that they would receive blessings from God, and that they would be a blessing.

[14 : 16] And this seed, you know, if you know your Old Testament, you know that Abraham was promised descendants, but he was childless.

And he, when he was 100 years old, finally, he had a son, Isaac.

And it was on this son that all of these promises, in a sense, he was carrying all these promises. Because with no child, with no seed, then how could there be a nation?

How could there be a land? But what's the scripture saying here? Who was the seed really? Who was the seed all along? Well, it says this, scripture does not say unto seeds, meaning many people, but unto your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

So, so the, the, the true seed that was promised, that would be a blessing to the nations, and in whom all the, all the nations would be blessed, was, was one person.

[15 : 21] And it wasn't Isaac, and it wasn't King David, but it was Christ. Christ was the, the descendant of Abraham, who truly fulfilled the law, and, and who took, took our curse, and he died, not just for Israel, but for the world.

And if we're in Christ, then we're blessed. If we're in Christ, then we are God's people. So all of these promises, promised to Abraham, find their fulfillment in Christ.

And so, the whole of the Old Testament, the law, the promises to Abraham, they're all pointing to Christ, and without Christ, they have no meaning.

And the whole of the Old Testament is looking forward to the one who would redeem us from the law, the one who would save us, and the one who would bless the nations, who would bring about a people for God, God's own people.

And so, whether you're a Jew, whether you're a Gentile, we're blessed in Abraham's seed in Christ, by putting our faith in Christ.

[16 : 26] So we continue to read about the seed who is Christ, and in verse 17, what I mean is this, the law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God, and thus do away with the promise.

So he's saying, the law of Moses, that doesn't do away with Abraham's promise of blessings for the nations, of the righteousness by faith.

But actually, the covenant with Abraham, it preceded the law, it preceded the covenant to Moses. And therefore, we're to be like Abraham, we're to be children of faith, and we're saved by our faith, in God.

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise, but God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise. Why then was the law given at all?

Well, yeah, we've covered that really. The law was given as a guardian, it was to show a standard, it was to show a way which Israel could never follow.

[17 : 40] And so the good news for the Jews, and the good news for us today, is that we're not saved by our works, but we're saved completely and 100% by Christ's finished work on the cross.

So what does that mean for us? Practically, what should that do to us? Well, one of the things we said about the way of legalism, the way of the law, is that it causes this inadequacy in us, it causes this helplessness in us, when we realise that we cannot attain it.

But sometimes I think we're guilty, although like the Galatians, we know we've been saved by grace, by Jesus on the cross. Sometimes we can slip back into a way of legalism.

So verse 3, it says this, are you so foolish after beginning by means of the spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? And I think sometimes we can be like that, we can be trying to finish by works of the flesh.

And we have this mindset that God isn't pleased with us, God doesn't want to know us, if we're not continually doing more and more good works.

[19 : 01] But the truth is we can never be good enough to please God. We please God not by our own works, but by faith in Christ. Now, does that mean, does that mean that we can just do what we want?

Well, no, if we're just doing what we want, if we're living in sin, then we haven't understood the gospel, have we? We haven't come to that point where we hate sin and we haven't seen the love of God, the love of Christ for us as he died for us on the cross.

When we see the hatred with which God hates sin and yet the love which he showed for us on the cross, you know, what that did to Jesus bearing our sin on the tree, then we're not going to take sin lightly.

And if we've been truly saved, if we have the spirit within us, then we're born again and we have a natural, though before we're Christians, we have a natural tendency to sin.

As Christians, we have a natural hatred of sin and aversion to sin. And that doesn't mean we'll be perfect. We won't be perfect until Christ comes again and we're made completely new.

[20 : 23] But we are new creations right now and we are being conformed into the image of Christ, though we still have to battle with the flesh in this life every day. So what does that look like when we do sin?

And I think sometimes when we have fallen short, when we've done something we know is wrong, that's when legalism can kick in and we can think, you know, how will I get back my relationship with God?

And if you're anything like me, sometimes that means that you don't pray for a while, but you try, in one sense, you try better yourself before you can come back into God's presence.

And if you actually think about that, that's completely stupid, isn't it? Because we can't better ourselves. We're not saved by our own works anyway. We're saved by Christ.

And so when we sin, we're not to look to ourselves to improve ourselves, but we're to look to Jesus, we're to look to the cross and we're to come into God's presence and we're to say sorry for our sins, but we're to look to the cross.

[21 : 33] That's where we are forgiven and that's where we were forgiven. And that's where we'll regain our confidence to come back into God's presence. And so that verse in Hebrews that I read as I opened for this service, it says, we have confidence to access the holiest place by the blood of Jesus.

So what's that saying? We have complete confidence to enter into God's presence, into the most holy place, the place where sin cannot be. We don't have confidence in ourselves because, you know, I've had a good day, because, you know, as far as I can see, I haven't sinned today.

Of course, we all have. But our confidence is always in the finished work of Christ. It's in his blood. And that's the only way we can ever have any relationship with God.

It's because of the blood of Jesus. It's because our sin has been covered by Christ. And so when we understand grace, it causes humility.

We're no longer going to have the sense of pride that I've earned something of my own salvation. It causes humility towards God. There's nothing that I've done which has earned my salvation.

[22 : 54] It's all of Christ. And that's a big thing for us humans to admit, isn't it? We're all prideful. I think that's natural to us. But to say, no God, without you, I'm nothing.

My salvation is all of you. And the only reason I can speak to you now is because of Christ. That's going to cause humility in us towards God. It's going to cause humility in our relationships to one another.

You know, it doesn't matter how rich we are. It doesn't matter what status we have in the world. It doesn't matter how good we think we are. At the end of the day, we're all sinners saved by grace. And so we're all equal in the church.

And actually, I love this verse. In verse, let me find this. Yeah, verse 28.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female. for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And so it was such a hypocrisy for Peter in the last chapter to separate from the Gentiles.

[24 : 13] Because if we're saved by grace, it doesn't matter our nationality. It doesn't matter how much money we have, whether we're a slave, whether we're free. It doesn't matter our gender, whether we're male or female.

And these are all big topics today in the news, aren't they? And we hear these words like diversity and inclusiveness.

But actually, the church is the most diverse place in the world. It's the most inclusive place in the world. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, what your family background is, what your status is in the world, what country you're from, what your gender is.

We're all welcome in Christ. We're all on a level playing field. We're all sinners saved by grace. And finally, it causes us to rest in him.

We're no longer striving for our own salvation, for our own standing before God. But out of a place of salvation, out of a place of grace, out of a place of forgiveness, we serve God out of love and out of thankfulness.

[25 : 21] So it causes humility in us. Well, we're going to close with a hymn. And it puts it in a nutshell. It's all about grace.

And so the hymn is this wonderful grace that gives what I don't deserve and shows me what Christ has earned. It's all of grace. It's all of Christ.

Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.