

Galatians 3:10-14 “The Righteous will live by Faith”

GAL 3:10-13 “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

When we look at a passage like this, or for that matter, this entire letter which deals with observing the law versus grace through Jesus Christ alone, one may wonder what the big deal is.

How is it that any true Christian could confuse this whole issue which seems to be black and white? Why do we spend time dealing with a subject which doesn’t seem to touch us personally? After all, we know that we can’t earn our way to heaven through the law. We know that Jesus Christ paid our debt in full. Why the attention?

Well, first of all it is God Himself who has devoted a whole letter to this issue. And while it’s true that it was directed to individuals in Galatia this is a letter to the entire church for all ages. And therefore it is meant to be instructive as well as encouraging to all believers.

There is a trend in the world today for people, who name the name of Christ, to simply find their common ground in that name instead of understanding that salvation is not just in a name but in the person whose name it is.

What I mean by this is that there is a huge difference between being identified with a name and actually knowing the person. I might take great delight in being able to hang around someone who knows Tony Dungie, the head coach for the Tampa Bay Bucs. But it’s no substitute for actually knowing Tony Dungie. (I neither know him or hang around someone who does).

But in a similar way there are people who rely on a mere association with those who know Christ, or a mere association with the church, who then think that they've fulfilled some requirement to be saved. They have in essence created a law to themselves which goes beyond the written word of God.

This will not save them. And it's as true today as it was during the time in which Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians. And one of the reasons Paul writes this letter to Christians is to emphasize the differences and then instruct them in such a way so they may be able to articulate these differences.

You may very well believe in the Pre-millennial, Pre-Tribulation approach to Christ's second return. But if you wanted to be able to articulate some of the finer points of this doctrine it would be wise to be instructed in not only the Pre-millennial approach, but also in the A-millennial as well as the Post-millennial teachings to see the differences.

And in a similar way Paul is giving these Galatians some of the finer points of the law versus grace so that if there was any confusion it would be cleared up, and then they would be encouraged to articulate the truth in such a way where there would no longer be any confusion.

After all, Paul knew he wouldn't be around forever. He needed to disciple others to carry on the truth. And that's why we study the word of God, and it's also why we as believers have an obligation to take these teachings and embrace them for ourselves personally so that in turn we may instruct others, either by directly teaching others these truths, or through our example.

Either way teaching is going on. This is why we are referred to as living letters.

2CO 3:3 "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

When someone reads our lives what are they being taught? Paul wants people to be taught that the grace of God, not the law, is what makes a difference in our lives. He wants people to realize that God has touched our hearts, not merely forced us to follow some regulation.

And whether they realized it or not, some of these Galatians were depicting the life of Christ in their lives with some outward

expression of the law written on tablets of stone, and then calling that a work of the Spirit in their hearts.

And there is always that danger in our own lives. We can become so complacent with our salvation that it often looks as though we've been put into auto-pilot to where we simply go through the motions instead of demonstrating a vibrant relationship with the living God as we please Him with a faith based life.

Now, for the Judaizers of Paul's day there was no pretense about how they were trying to please God. It was not faith based, but performance based as they not only included the law as a way of life, but also as a way of contributing to their salvation.

But the word of God is very clear on what happens to those who fall short of keeping the law perfectly.

DEU 27:26 "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out."

In other words, if you don't carry them out according to the letter of the law you will receive the curse, or the penalty. This by the way was the reason for the yearly Day of Atonement where Israel found that they could be forgiven of their sin through a sacrifice on their behalf.

They knew they couldn't keep the law perfectly and so they relied upon the sacrificial system God gave them, which was to be received by faith. How else could it be received? How in the world does the blood of an animal take away sin? Well, it doesn't. But if you place your faith in God who uses that lamb to represent the One who will come to take away your sin, then that sacrificial system becomes your way to life, based on faith in what it represents.

But you know what? You could observe the Day of Atonement without faith. You could simply obey out of compulsion. You could simply go through the motions. But unless you received it by faith it wouldn't do anything for you.

It's the same today. People trust themselves for righteousness, and not the one who would take their place.

And so, Paul continues to demonstrate the truth of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to grow in Christ as he addresses the Galatians in verse 10 of our text.

GAL 3:10 "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

A more accurate translation would be, "as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse..." (NASB)

Two things need to be noted in this verse:

- 1) what are the works of the law?
- 2) and what is this curse which is related to the law?

When we talk about the works of the law we are distinguishing between simply keeping the law, (which every Jew was commanded to do by God Himself), and using the law as a means of justification before God.

Moses, for example, kept the law. But Moses never used the law as though it made him righteous. Rather, because Moses believed God and loved God and so he was willing to obey God in matters which had to do with the law.

And so, in one sense, Moses was simply doing what God commanded because he already had a relationship with God through faith. Works followed faith. It was his faith in God which resulted in having a righteousness from God. One reason the law was added was to distinguish Israel from the other nations as being a people ruled by God.

There were certainly other reasons for the law as Paul points out in this letter, but this was an important distinction as the other nations surrounding Israel were not personally approached by God in the same way He approached Israel, as He then gave them the law. This is why Paul asks the question concerning Israel.

ROM 3:1 "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God."

The law is the word of God. And the Jews were the personal recipients of this word. But they were recipients not because they had kept the law, but because God graciously chose them and called them out to be a special people long before the law was ever given to them.

Had they somehow earned God's favor before receiving the law? No. Then how could they possibly earn God's favor after receiving and then keeping the law? They couldn't. And yet, unfortunately

many of them had taken that very law and used it as a means of trying to earn God's favor instead of realizing that God's law was never meant to be used this way.

And so, when we talk about those who are of the works of the law, we are talking about those who use the law in place of simply believing on the promises of God. And so, Paul says that those who are of the works of the law are under a curse.

Now, the idea here is that a curse carries with it a judgment. And the judgment related to the law is death if that law is not kept perfectly as it is relied upon to get you to heaven. In this sense the law is a very hard taskmaster. It doesn't cut you any slack.

Why? Because it addresses the perfect and holy nature of the one who gave the law, namely God Himself. In this sense the law reflects the perfect nature of God who demands perfection if we are to have a relationship with Him.

And if we don't keep His law perfectly then there is a curse attached to it, or to put it another way, there is a penalty attached to it; the same penalty that was attached to the first law given to mankind when God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the forbidden fruit. That penalty or curse was death.

And so, if you want to be under the works of the law, then you need to realize that you will be under the law's curse or penalty which is death. That's the only thing the law will produce in our lives if we're going to use it as a means of trying to attain righteousness.

On the other hand, the law was used as a measuring stick of Israel's faith in God prior to Christ coming into this world. This is why I said earlier that Israel was meant to be keepers of the law. But this was to be with the understanding that they were following God by faith in the promises that were given to Abraham, and then out of gratitude they were to obey God.

It's no different today. You and I are to be a people who obeys God. But our obedience doesn't earn us salvation, it's the result of our salvation. This is why Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (JOH 14:15)

Obedience follows love. And our love for God comes from Him first loving us and giving us life eternal. To suggest that trying to obey God earns His love for us is backwards. And it was backwards for Israel who was using the law in this very way. If

we use the law in this way we will suffer its curse, its penalty, which is death.

On the other hand, if obedience to the law, as a means of earning God's favor, will only produce death, then how do we come out from under that curse? And here is where Paul really hits the ball out of the park as far as these Judaizers were concerned, who were using the O.T. Scriptures to justify their position of adding the law to Christ.

GAL 3:11 "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

The word does not say, the righteous will live by the works of the law, but by faith. Now, how does this negate what the Judaizers are teaching? Well, keep in mind that the Judaizers are using the Scriptures to convince the Gentiles that to be truly saved one must be like the Jew who had the law and kept the law.

Paul comes along and quotes the very O.T. Scriptures they were using and shows them that the word of God only has one way whereby a person can have righteousness before God, and that's by faith. He's actually quoting the prophet Habakkuk.

HAB 2:4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but the righteous will live by his faith -...."

What does this mean? It means that for a man to be righteous and to live in that righteousness he must go outside of himself for righteousness, since he has none in himself which will satisfy God's demand of a perfect righteousness, so as to have a relationship with the living God.

Where does that righteousness come from? It comes from God since He is perfect and righteous and holy. And so, to be declared righteous is to believe God at His word as He promises to reconcile us back to Himself through the means He provides in the perfect sacrifice.

That's why God could declare Abraham righteous when He approached Abraham with a promise that he would be the father of many nations. Abraham simply submitted to the Almighty God who made such a promise long before Abraham had any children. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

And that's what the prophet Habakkuk is saying. In fact, we know that this is what Habakkuk is saying as the Holy Spirit inspires the writer of Hebrews and Paul as they both use this same verse contained in the O.T. Scriptures.

HEB 10:37 -39 "For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

ROM 1:17 "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Now, why don't we want to use the law as a means of justification? Why does the law fall short when it comes to faith? Well, Paul answers that for us in our text.

GAL 3:12 "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

Now wait a minute. I thought we said earlier that when Moses, for example, kept the law he was doing so out of faith in God. He was. But it wasn't a faith in the law. It was a faith in the promises of God, not the least of which was to bring His people into the Promised Land. His keeping of the law was out of obedience and love for the God he placed his faith in.

And so, when Paul says that the law is not based on faith he simply states the fact that the law is an expression of God's holiness which He desires His people to emulate. But it doesn't take faith to keep the law. Anybody can follow a set of rules. Anybody can make a list of do's and don'ts and set out to observe them.

That doesn't take faith, it takes effort. And again, Paul quotes the O.T. Scriptures in making his point when he says in verse 11, "on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

In other words, if you're going to determine the future of your eternal life based on the keeping of the law, then you need to be willing to live by the consequences of not keeping that law perfectly. And Paul has already told us that in verse 10; you receive the curse.

GAL 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

Paul is continuing to use the very O.T. Scriptures these Judaizers were using to prove that the law needed to be added to the work of Christ. But before we look at that Paul lays the foundation for how the law was able to be kept perfectly by someone who could then take our place.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..."

What does this mean? This statement sums up what God demands of all people. The penalty must be paid. Someone must suffer the curse because men have not kept the law; they have fallen short of God's perfect holiness which is seen in the law.

So, if we must suffer the curse, which is death, how can we be bought back? That's what the word redeemed means here. This was a word used to describe how someone could be bought and become the possession of someone else. You might have sold yourself into slavery to pay a debt.

Well, a relative comes along and pays that debt and brings you out from under the obligation you had to that person you owed money to. In that sense you've been redeemed.

The same is true of us. We owed God our very lives. That's the debt. But His Son comes along and pays that debt in full as He goes to the cross, after having kept the law perfectly, and then He dies in our place. By having satisfied the debt Jesus Christ extends the gift of redemption to us to receive by faith.

In this way He has become a curse for us. What this means is that He did not become a sinner, but embodied our sin on Himself. Prior to this we were the curse and we deserved to die. But Jesus becomes the curse and dies in our place though He was sinless.

And Paul uses the Scriptures to prove that the Messiah had to do this. I mean we need to understand that for many Jews, the idea that their Messiah had to suffer and die was abhorrent to them, and still is even today. They look for a Messiah who is strong and who will deliver them from the bondage they suffer in this world.

They have missed the point that the Messiah must first become the curse that they presently are. And then Paul shows them from their

own Scriptures as he quotes the law given to them by Moses through God.

DEU 21:22 “If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, 23 you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.”

What this law means is that when someone committed a capital crime they were to be put to death. The method Israel used was not to crucify them, but to stone them, according to the word of God. But after they were stoned they would then be put on display by hanging them on a tree for all to see.

And so, when people would pass by and see this dead body on a tree this was a clear indication that they had suffered the curse of God, which in this case was death for his crime.

The way in which this is connected to Jesus Christ is that our Lord was convicted of a capital crime. The crime was treason as He was accused of declaring Himself to be a king when there was only one King in the Roman Empire, and that was Caesar.

This, by the way, is the reason there was a sign hung over the cross of Christ which identified His crime.

MAT 27:37 “Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

In fact, since Jerusalem was kind of a metropolitan city with peoples of different backgrounds and languages Pilate made sure everyone in the city understood why Jesus was being crucified, hung on a tree.

JOH 19:20 “Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.”

But in fulfilling the law perfectly, just as that criminal under the law according to Deuteronomy, Jesus could not stay on that cross over night.

DEU 21:23 “you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day...”

And sure enough that same day Jesus was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb of a rich man. He became our curse as He took our penalty. He bought us back as He redeemed us.

GAL 3:14 “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

We’re now back to the blessing of Abraham, which these Judaizers were saying was coming through both Jesus Christ and the law. But the blessing given to Abraham couldn’t come through the law since the law was never given to Abraham. And this is the point Paul is trying to drive home.

In fact, Paul says that even the Gentiles can receive this same blessing of Abraham simply by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by the same faith Abraham had, not by the law which Abraham didn’t have.

You don’t have to be limited to being a Jew and you certainly don’t have to observe the law given to the Jews to enjoy the blessing Abraham enjoyed. This was the message to the Galatians. It was meant to bless them and encourage them that they need only believe and walk in that belief, not add the law to what Christ had already done by becoming our curse.

By faith we receive the promise of the Spirit, and by faith we are sealed by the same Spirit for the day of redemption. The Spirit of God will also empower us to walk in the ways of our Lord, not as a way to earn His favor, but as a way to show our love and gratitude that we have new life in Christ.

COL 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”