

SUPERIORITY OF THE GOSPEL

Galatians 3:1-14

Key Verse: 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."

In Galatians 1 and 2, St. Paul reminded us of the salvation grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ and testified for us how to fight a spiritual battle to preserve the truth of the gospel. In Chapters 3 and 4, Paul sets out to prove to us why salvation is by faith in Christ alone and not by observing the law. To achieve this, Paul gives us various contrasts and arguments, reminding us our personal experience with Christ (3:1-5), relevant Old Testament passages (3:6-14) and historical arguments (4:1-11). He also gives us a sentimental argument (4:12-18) and concludes with a contrast between Sarah and Hagar.

In today's passage, Paul explains how Christ redeemed us, and reminds us that by believing, we receive the promise of the Spirit and the blessing given to Abraham.

I. "DID YOU RECEIVE THE SPIRIT BY OBSERVING THE LAW?" (1-5)

Look at verse 1. *You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.* The Apostle Paul used strong language to rebuke the believers in Galatia. He was very disappointed by their failure to hold fast the truth of the gospel. He was hurt and deeply concerned for their spiritual growth. It was his shepherd's heart that prompted the strong words of reproach. By asking the question "Who has bewitched you?" Paul acknowledged that their distraction from the gospel was not likely their willful decision. It was work of Satan! Jesus had warned that Satan would plant weeds in the field of grain. Paul knew that ultimately it was Satan who planted the seed of false teaching in the hearts of the believers.

Paul then reminded them how he had clearly portrayed the crucifixion of Jesus before their very eyes. Paul couldn't show them a video clip from the Passion of Christ; he didn't have the benefit of modern technology. But somehow, he portrayed the crucifixion vividly for them. His message was always focused on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Paul had preached them the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly. For example, in Pisidian Antioch, Paul had told them, "...my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Ac 13:38-39). After only a couple of years, however, the Galatian believers were now lending their ears to the false teachings of the circumcision group. So Paul asked them, "How could you stray from this vivid message of the cross of Jesus I preached to you?"

Look at verses 2-5. *"I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so*

foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"

Paul asked the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" At this time, let us also ask ourselves how we became Christians. Was it some sort of religious rituals we did that moved our hearts to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior? Was it our human effort to build a stone tower or to bow down before a god 1,000 times that inspired us to believe in the Lord? No, none of us became Christians in that way. Each and everyone of us heard the message of the gospel. In my case, it was the word of God I heard at a summer Bible conference and the 1:1 Bible studies afterwards with my Bible teacher. Through the word of God, I was moved to accept Jesus into my life. It was a miracle that God worked in my life. Because of the painful experience with a religious cult in my childhood, I had vowed myself not to get involved in any kind of religion ever again. But the Holy Spirit moved my heart through the word of God. I believe most of us here can say that we came to believe "what we heard" through studying the word of God with someone. The Holy Spirit touched our hearts through the word of God. God worked miracles in our lives through the word of God (5). We did not become believers by human efforts. Neither did the Galatian believers. But now, some of them were turning their attention to the Judaizers who said they had to observe the Jewish laws and regulations in order to be saved. In effect, they were denying the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit done in their lives by turning to the law. They were taking backward steps in their spiritual growth. It was a foolish thing in Paul's eyes. It broke his heart.

So the question for us today is this: How can we maintain gospel faith and avoid legalism in our life and ministry? The crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus should always be our main focus, personally and as a ministry. Anything and everything we do should be from our love and gratitude for Jesus, so that we may not become proud. The problem with legalism is that we become discouraged when we fail to observe the law. On the other hand, we become proud when we think we are pretty good in keeping the law. Neither of these is good before God's eyes. Still, some people, just like Galatians, may be drawn to legalism. Why? One reason may be that they remain insecure in their faith because faith alone seems too easy and abstract. Faith seems unreal to them because they cannot touch it or grab it. They try to become close to God by doing some tangible things. Doing something for real such as performing a ritual gives them a sense of accomplishment and even a sense of security. But this is a false security based on our own ideas and feelings. It is an attempt to be religious in our own terms. It is not the way to submit ourselves to God and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us. Instead, we should remember the grace of Jesus and obey his words, because to live by faith in Christ means to have a personal relationship with him.



II. CONSIDER ABRAHAM (6-9)

The Judiazers insisted that Gentiles had to become Jews first in order to be saved. Paul reminded them that Abraham, the father of faith, received the grace of God by faith, not by works. Look at verses 6-9. *Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* Paul says that God declared Abraham righteous when he believed in God. He did not work hard to earn his salvation. This was a great precedent set by God. Salvation comes by faith, not by works. Abraham became a role model for all believers, including the Gentiles. All of us are justified by faith alone. We are blessed by God when we believe in his promises, just as he blessed Abraham for his faith.

Paul explains this further in Romans 4. "Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (Ro 4:9-12).

What was Abraham's circumstance when God credited to him as righteous? We find the accounts in Genesis 15. It had been ten years since God promised Abraham to bless him to be a great nation with many children. But by this time, he had no children, not even one. So he considered adopting one of his servants as his heir. In addition, to save his nephew, he got involved in a regional conflict and made many enemies. He had also given up the war spoils, a lot of money. He was afraid and felt a sense of loss. He was sitting inside the dark tent, feeling sorry about his life. God took him outside and showed him the Middle East night sky that was filled with millions of stars. God told him, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars... so shall your offspring be" (Ge 15:5). God's promise seemed too great to believe. Abraham could have said, "Lord, just give me one son. That will be enough for me." But he didn't say that. Abraham believed the Lord. Then God credited it to him as righteousness. Abraham had not done anything for God to deserve it. Only one thing he did--he believed the Lord. He believed that God would do what he promised him. He trusted in God. God accepted his faith and said he was righteous. This is true for us. God grants us his grace when we trust in him. We cannot earn his grace by keep the law. We are justified by our faith in Christ, not by works.

On a side note, we are not saying here that works are bad. What we do for the Lord pleases him if we do it by remembering his grace and love. In fact, our work for the Lord can be evidence that our faith in him is real. This is what James says: “You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone” (Ja 2:20-24). Are Paul and James contradicting to each other? No, they complement each other. We are justified by faith in Christ (Paul) and our obedience is the evidence that our faith in Christ is genuine (James). That is why Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 that “...we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

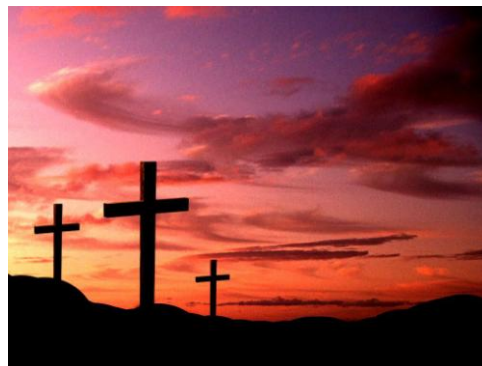
III. CHRIST REDEEMED US (10-14)

Look at verses 10-11. *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.”* Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 which says that all who rely on observing the law for their salvation are under a curse. Why? It is because no one can observe the law perfectly without blame. If you don’t believe me, try to make an Excel spreadsheet for the 613 OT laws to check if you can observe all of them absolutely everyday. No one can continue to keep all the laws all the time. It is not possible. So, our efforts to be righteous on our own will end up in failure for sure. How many times have we said, “I will be better next time,” or “I won’t do that again” and failed again and again? Paul himself personally experienced this. As a devout Pharisee, he kept all commandments faithfully. But he failed on the 10th commandment—“Do not covet.” He tried and tried, but the more he tried not to covet, the more he became covetous. He was utterly frustrated and exclaimed, “What a wretched man I am!” If he kept 99 laws but failed to observe one, he was still a law breaker and he was doomed. So he concludes in verse 11: “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law.” He also quotes from Habakkuk 2:4; “The righteous will live by faith.”

Look at verse 12. *The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”* This means the law is not based on God’s grace but on human effort alone. Yet we do not have the power to keep the law. So we are condemned. The law brings curse upon us. Whether Jew or Gentile, all of us are under a curse because of disobedience to the law of God. But God is love. The law is not based on faith. Trying to live by the law is not biblical. We should live by faith in Christ Jesus.

Let us read verse 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.”* Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Jesus suffered physically and mentally to bear all our sins on him and pay the price in our place. He

was hung on the cross, half-naked, before his family and relatives. Passersby hurled insults at him. Jesus redeemed us by dying as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He shed his precious blood for us. Paul sums up the love of Christ for us in Romans 5: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro 5:6-8).



For what purpose did Christ redeem us? How did his death on the cross open the way for Abraham’s blessing and the promise of the Spirit to come to all who believe? Look at verse 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.* Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to all of us, including the Gentiles, through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

In today’s passage, we learned several things about relying on Christ crucified. It is to remember that Jesus saved us from our sin and death by giving his life on the cross for us. We did not do anything to deserve it. It is only by grace of God. We cannot add anything to our salvation by what we do with a legalistic attitude. Instead, we must believe in God’s promises as Abraham did, even those that do not make sense. No matter what we do, we should do it out of our love for Christ, remembering his love for us.

God declares that we are righteous because of our faith in Christ. We are saved from sin and death when we believe the gospel, not by works. As forgiven sinners, we should continue to live by faith, remembering what Christ has done for us. We don’t need to perform some ritual things for God to maintain salvation. We live by faith. We trust God in all things. This is the blessed life. May God bless us when we live by faith in Christ alone!