

Galatians 3 v1-14

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] The church in Galatia have got a particular problem.! They'd become Christians through the Apostle Paul.

! They'd heard the message. They'd received it by faith. They believed with great joy. Persecution came. There was pressures.

There were struggles. There was persecution. But the church in Galatia stood. They were brave in the face of conflict. The question for them was now what?

They didn't instantly become perfect. They still, as a church, had difficulties. Like you and I have difficulties.

They struggled with envy. And with anger. And with idolatry. They struggled with lust. They struggled with immorality and arrogance.

[1 : 00] And greed. And their very practical question was this. How do I go on in the Christian life? How do I get more love?

How do I get more forgiveness? How do I grow in self-control? How do I go ahead in the Christian life?

And for those of us who've trusted in the Lord Jesus, it's a question for all of us, isn't it? It's a question which we all struggle with. And of course, for the Galatians, it was even more difficult because a group of Christian teachers, or so-called Christian teachers, had come from headquarters in Jerusalem.

And they were bringing the latest cutting-edge growth tool. They were very impressive. And they were very sincere. And they were very nice.

And their simple answer was this. That the way to go forward as a Christian is you go back to the law. That was their message. And the way to go forward was to go back.

[2 : 07] The way to go forward as a Christian was to go back to the law. And so what God said to Moses, they said to the church in Galatia, what God said to Moses is a beautiful religious frame for your life.

And it will help you if you go back to the law of Moses. It will control what you eat. And what you wear. And what day you do things.

And it will give you all sorts of religious observance. That's the way to go forward, to go back. And to the Galatians, as well as to us Presbyterians, that is very attractive.

To be told what to do and when to do it and how to do it. To be told exactly what you need. And this is what you need. Let me give it to you. And it's very, very attractive.

We've called it before, haven't we? Bop it, Christianity. You know that game, Bop it? You've seen the game, Bop it? And so you press the game on it and it shouts at you, doesn't it? It says pull it, twist it, push it.

[3 : 13] And we love that. Churches love that. You love it on a Sunday morning when I get up and give you a bit of a kick in and tell you what to do. That's what churches love. But it's a massive problem in the Christian faith.

Because it's the opposite of the way that we ought to think. The way we advance in the Christian life, according to the Apostle, is exactly the same way that we entered the Christian life at the beginning.

The way that we advance in the Christian life is exactly the same way as we entered into the Christian life. They're not two different things. We enter the same way that we grow.

And so we begin the Christian life by faith. By forsaking all, I take him. By resting and relying on Jesus Christ alone.

That's how we begin the Christian life, by faith. We live the Christian life by faith. And we end the Christian life by faith. Let me remind you of what Paul said in the passage we looked at last time. [4 : 20] Look at chapter 3 and verse 1. O foolish Galatians, who's bewitched you? Who's cast a spell on you? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

And so let me ask you only this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law? Or by hearing with faith? Verse 5. Does he now... Verse 5.

Does he... We're in the present tense right now. We're in the present tense. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or hearing with faith? You see, it is infuriatingly humbling to our pride. And I think it only gets worse as I get older as a Christian.

It feels like, doesn't it, there must be something that I have to do. There must be something that I have to do. If I know God utterly accepts me in the death of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 40] But surely, surely I must make some contribution. Surely I don't just grow by mere faith. And I think most of us think that we become Christians by faith.

And that we grow by hard work and effort. And in these verses 6 to 14, the Apostle wants us to see this amazing, remarkable thing.

That at the heart of the daily, hourly, minute by minute, practical life of the Christian is living by faith. And what he does is he opens up a chasm in this chapter.

And he says there are two ways to live. And both of them look very religious from the outside. In fact, sometimes when you look at them from the outside, they look very similar.

One is living by faith. And the other is living by law or works of the law. So let me just show you the two contrasts quickly. In verse 7, it literally says, so you see that it is those who are of faith.

[6 : 47] It is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And then verse 9. It is those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham.

And then verse 10. The contrast is there for the second half of the passage. All who rely on works of the law. Well, literally, all who are works of the law are under a curse.

So that's what I want to do this morning. It's very simple. Two ways to live. What does it mean to live the life of faith, firstly? To live in faith.

To live a life based on faith. To live a life out of faith. And in verse 6 to 9, the apostle uses the illustration of Abraham. It's a brilliant illustration.

Because you remember the teachers from Galatia were saying, listen, you've got to go backwards to go forwards. You've got to go back to Judaism. You've got to go back to the law.

[7 : 46] And Paul says, okay, let's go back and see how they lived out the Christian life. Let's go back to Abraham, the father of the faith. Because right from the beginning to the end of Abraham's life, the big issue is not whether Abraham was a decent bloke, but the promise of God.

It was whether Abraham believed. Verse 6. Thus, just as Abraham believed God. Abraham believed God.

And it was counted to him as righteousness. Notice, it doesn't say there that Abraham believed in God. He doesn't believe in God.

It's not just I'm ticking a box on a census. They're ticking a box on the creed. It says, Abraham believed God. That means he believed the words that God said to him.

And the promise of God came to him. And it came to Abraham and said, salvation is not going to come from you, Abraham. It is going to come from my intervention in your life.

[8 : 59] And Abraham believed God's word. And it was reckoned to him as righteousness. And it's an accounting word. It's a money word. God takes the funds from one account.

And he reckons them into another's account. So that what was not Abraham's is now Abraham's. And he reckons it to him as righteousness.

Abraham did not become righteousness in himself. But through faith in the promise of God, it was reckoned to him. It was credited to him.

It was put to his account. It was transferred to him. God treats him as righteous. It's exactly the same for us. We are not righteous in our souls.

In our heart of hearts, righteousness is not a quality that lives in us. It is a gift from God.

[10 : 03] It is external to us. But we enjoy it by faith. It's the mark of the true Christian. The real Christian this morning, who's living in faith, looks into his own heart.

And what does the true Christian see when they look into their heart? They see poverty. They see a mess. They see their sinfulness. And they cry out in mercy.

And they look out to the Lord Jesus and his death for righteousness. They don't look into their own life. And I know that is absolutely contradictory to all the self-help books published in the last 30 years and nearly every Instagrammer who's influencing people.

The self-help gurus. But I want you to see something of the power of this. Paul quotes the Old Testament a number of times in this passage. And I want to just look at one of them with you. That quote in verse 6 comes from Genesis chapter 15.

So put your hand in Galatians 3 and come back with me to Genesis chapter 15. Come back with me. Write to the first book of the Bible and Genesis chapter 15.

[11:17] And look at this promise. Chapter 15 and verse 1. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision saying, Fear not.

Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield and your very great reward. Your shield and your reward shall be very great. It's a beautiful promise, isn't it? And then look at verse 6.

It says, Abraham believed the Lord and he counted it to him. He reckoned it to him as righteousness. Now here's the question.

When did the story of Abraham begin? Well, for you Bible nerds, Bible scholars, it began in chapter 12, didn't it? And by chapter 15, a lot of water has gone under the bridge and a lot of murky water.

At the end of chapter 12, Abraham goes down to Egypt and his wife is so beautiful. His wife is so stunning that Abraham is frightened that the king will kill him to get his wife.

[12:31] And so he concocts a plan with his wife Sarah and he says, I'm going to call you my sister. It's a strange, strange episode. The king marries Abraham's wife.

It's an interesting story. I'm not going to preach it to you today. But it is a wrong thing. It is a very wobbly thing for Abraham to do. Read through the Abraham narrative and again and again, you see how Abraham is a letdown.

How he wobbles. But here we are in chapter 15 and here's the point. Chapter 15 is in the middle of Abraham's life of faith. He's been a believer for a long time.

He's not beginning. He's been beginning his life of faith. That's the point. That's why the apostle uses this verse. Paul goes back to Genesis chapter 15 not to show how Abraham started off in faith but to show, chapter 15, how Abraham continued in faith.

So go back to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 9 and Paul says this. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham who had faith.

[13:50] It is continuous. It is ongoing. And so again and again, I want to say to you that the way we come into the kingdom is by simple faith.

Most of us think that the way that we go on in the kingdom is by trying harder. So test yourself with me. Have you ever said to yourself, I've been a Christian for such and such a time, 10 years, say? I've been a Christian for 10 years and I really ought to not be so angry. I ought to be more forgiving. I ought to try harder. I ought to not think those things.

I ought to get my act together. What the apostle is saying here is that if you're having trouble with self-control and that if this morning you can't control your sexual appetites or if this morning you find it impossible to forgive yourself or to forgive others, the only way to advance through that issue is exactly the same way that you came to Christ in the first place.

And that is by having Jesus Christ and him crucified publicly portrayed before your eyes.

[15:08] And it is to see him and as we see him that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and gives us faith. The way that we receive the Holy Spirit, do you remember, is by hearing, the hearing of faith.

We've already seen that in chapter 3 and so what we do is we go back and we go back and we go back and we go back again and again and again to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And that is how we advance and that is how we grow. It is through believing the gospel. And I want to just point out one stunning verse in verse 8.

I want to leave it with you as a little bit of homework. Can you see verse 8? It's a puzzling verse. It says this, the scriptures, the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed.

So here's my homework for you. How on earth can Paul say that scripture preached the gospel to Abraham when scripture wasn't written at that point?

[16:29] And I'm not sure. So you can bring me your answers in the next week. But I think it means this. It means that whenever we sit down and we open the word of God, there is as much revealing power as when God spoke to Abraham from heaven.

because every time we open God's word, God preaches the gospel. Every time we read the Bible, if we're reading Nehemiah or we're reading the book of Judges or we're reading the Psalms, God is preaching Jesus Christ to us and him crucified.

That is the life of faith. Let's turn secondly, let's look briefly at the opposite. What does the life of law look like?

Look at verse 10. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

And the problem for many of us who grew up in the West is when we hear the word curse, if you're of a certain age, you think of Harry Potter. And for those of us who are a little bit older, when we hear the word curse, we think of kind of mummies, the curse of the mummies or something from Scooby-Doo.

[18:04] But when the Bible uses the word curse, it is using the word to speak about a spiritual condition. And the life of blessing is the life promised by God.

But when we live out of the works of the law, not out of faith, we turn from blessing to curse. Now, some understand me here, there is nothing wrong with the law of God.

And the law of God is good and it is upright and it is wholesome. We should take delight in the law of the Lord. The law of the Lord was given to shape the people of God.

Do you remember? I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is given to the people of God to shape them. It is given to them to give them boundaries on to know how to love God.

the law is not opposed to faith. And if you have true Christian faith, it will show itself in the works of the law.

[19:07] And so the issue, don't misunderstand the issue, the issue is not whether we're trying to keep the law. The issue is this, whether we're relying on the works of the law. You see, the law will justify every person, verse 10 says, who keeps every single part of it.

The problem is, we don't and we can't. Unless we keep all of it with all our hearts all the time, we are under the curse of God. And that is why you see, to rely on the law is completely frustrating and futile.

It is futile to live one's life based on one's works of the law. Of course, we seek to obey it and we seek to keep it. Again, that's not the issue.

The issue is whether I live on the works of the law, resting on it, relying on it. The issue is not law-breaking or law-keeping but law-relying.

It's one thing to live a good life, I hope we all are, but it's another thing to put our hope in that life or to imagine that you stand before God on the basis of that life or imagine that you stand and look at the world in kind of a way that you're above them because of that life.

[20:29] And I think every single one of us is tempted to do that even when we know the love of the Lord Jesus. We're always tempted, we are constantly tempted to rely on the works of the law.

And the Apostle Paul says it's a contradiction. You cannot do it. And our life is either relying on faith or relying on works of the law.

And if we trust our works and if we trust our growth and if we trust in anything we do for our salvation, we are under God's curse. And that is again, isn't it, why we have to go back again and again and again to Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I just want to show you as we finish in verses 13 and 14 that is exactly what the Apostle Paul does. It's a beautiful illustration of verse 1, verse 13 and 14. He holds up Jesus Christ and him crucified before us so that our hearts would be ravished, so that our faith would be attracted and attached to him and not to ourselves.

Verse 13. It says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us.

[21:56] For it is written, cursed be everyone who hangs in a tree that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles that we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith.

Verse 13, he quotes Deuteronomy, doesn't he? He says, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. It's speaking of somebody who's been executed for blasphemy and then their bodies hang on a tree as a sign that the person who died is under the curse of God.

And when God said those words in Deuteronomy 21, he had one person in mind. It was his only begotten son. And what Paul says here is, it's not merely that Jesus was punished for us. It's not that Jesus was treated as sinful instead of us. No, Paul says he became a curse for us so that we might become a blessing. And that is so important for our day-to-day living this week. It's not just that when we come to Christ, he wipes our slate clean and we're forgiven. Wonderful though that is. But the gospel is much, much bigger than that.

[23 : 19] It is that God transfers the righteousness of Jesus Christ to us. And so we are regarded by God this morning as those who are in Christ as beautiful, delightful, righteous.

It is not just that God takes away our sin and puts it onto the Lord Jesus and then says, you've got another second chance this week, go for it again, try your best.

get a better record and we come back, failure, failure and we have to get the slate clean and again and again and again we go through this process.

That's not what the Christian life is like. Living that way, what does it do? It puts enormous pressure on us to live lives based on the works of the Lord.

No, no, no. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 said, didn't he, that he, the Lord Jesus, became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God and our righteousness does not come from our works.

[24 : 31] It comes, doesn't it, from this glorious swap, this glorious exchange in the death of Jesus Christ and that is why the death of the Lord Jesus is so, so important for us because it is in the death of the Lord Jesus that God makes him accursed, that God makes him sin and that God makes us righteous, all the righteousness of God.

And that's why it's so important. So in this word, in this passage, Paul gives us three finance words. Three finance words. This week was the budget, isn't it?

I can never understand the budget, but I complain about it. And one of the worst moments in church life is when the treasurer or the finance people in church bring the spreadsheet.

I couldn't even remember the word. They bring the spreadsheet and I sit with the elders and I chair the discussion on finance and I can't understand the spreadsheet. And so I gauge what the room is doing and nod along with the majority.

Income and outcome, but here there's a spreadsheet that you can understand. So three spreadsheet words. The first word is the word counted. It's pretty easy to understand, isn't it?

[25 : 54] Counting something. So verse 6, reckoned. He reckons, he counts us as righteous. It's really easy, the transferring of funds from one account to the other.

And so he transfers into our account the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's the first finance word. Counted. Second finance word is in verse 8 and verse 11.

It's the word justify. So the accountants know what that word means. To justify the accounts. The word means it's all placed to our credit.

The righteousness of Christ is placed to our credit. the account. The account now has our name on it. And then even more wonderfully, verse 13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

That's the third word. It's an ordinary common garden word for going out of the house, taking your money with you to shop, and buying something and bringing it home. And Paul is saying that God paid this price for us.

[27 : 05] Christ redeemed us by giving, by making himself a curse and freely offering us his righteousness. And that's why to be of the works of the law is a total contradiction to being of faith.

We receive the righteousness and the blessing of God not by works but by faith. Not just once but every day and every hour of every day.

And this is the heart of the Christian faith, brothers and sisters. It is substitution. And we try to substitute ourselves for God and God's response in his mercy and in his love is to substitute himself for us and to take our curse.

And that is why in the death of Jesus Christ we have resources we've never begun to realise yet. It is not just an entry into eternal life.

It is not just a slate wipe clean. It means that God gives us all the righteousness of Jesus and he regards us as beautiful. And it's not about beginning the Christian life.

[28 : 24] This life of faith, faith in what God has done begins the life, continues the life and it is faith that will bring us to the point of completion in the Christian life. And so our exercise today and every day is to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. To hear the words of the gospel which God is preaching to us even now and to accept them by faith that Jesus Christ was made and he became a curse for us that we might become his righteousness.

Amen, Amen, and Amen. Let's pray.