

Galatians 3:10-14

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[0 : 00] Well, you hear stories, don't you, of people working in dangerous places, doing dangerous work.! But sometimes the most dangerous work is done when it's done in the wrong way.

Like the story of the trainee tree surgeon who worked really, really hard, chainsawing through a branch on an oak tree to quickly realise it was the branch that he was attached to.

Or the builder who worked really, really hard resurfacing a road but got the mixture wrong and managed to cement himself into the concrete.

I'm glad to say that none of them were injured permanently. But done in the wrong way, some work is dangerous, isn't it? And you know, it is the same with the Christian life.

It is quite hard work, isn't it, being a Christian. It's rigorous. Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

[1 : 00] But attempt to do the work of the Christian life in the wrong way and it will be dangerous work. It will be dangerous for you and for others.

It's the danger that actually Paul's listeners, the Galatians, were in. They were really keen on doing God's work, weren't they? On fulfilling God's law.

They were the decent people, the good people. They were hard workers for God. But ironically we've seen throughout the letter that they were the ones in danger.

Paul tells them earlier in Galatians that they've turned to a different gospel because they're doing work for God in the wrong way.

Paul describes what people like them are doing in verse 10 if you look there. They are like those who rely on works of the law.

[1 : 58] Do you see what they're doing? Their work is being done in the wrong way and it's dangerous because of that one word there.

Rely. They're building upon, they're leaning upon, they're trusting in their good works. And so the kind of motto for their Christian life, a kind of reading that is above the pulpit in their church, their kind of slogan, says, Obey to belong.

Obey to belong. Obey God so that you can belong to him. So that he will smile on you and accept on you. Obeying to belong.

But live like that. Think like that. Do the Christian life like that. And you're doing the work in the wrong way. And you're in great danger, Paul warns.

Paul explains here that it is possible to be working really hard for God and have a false sense of security in those works. And the problem with relying on works of the law is twofold.

[3 : 13] Doing it means one of two extremes. Because if you do that, you can be guilty without feeling guilty. Or you could feel guilty without being guilty.

Now let me kind of try and unpack that. Good works, first of all, can give you a false sense of security. That you can be guilty without feeling guilty.

You can be guilty without feeling guilty. Paul says, and we're going to focus on verse 10 to 14 in the middle.

Paul says there's a lie going around that we tell ourselves. That we think we're better at pleasing God than we actually are. That we can sort of fudge our CV and pretend that we're qualified.

And that our lives will hold out to when God sees them and they will be quality. They will be good enough. And our works for God in the Christian life can make us feel one thing when actually something else is true.

[4 : 24] They can make us feel blessed by God when in reality the opposite is true. Verse 10. Again, all who rely on works of the law are very blessed and pleasing to God.

No, that's not what he says, is it? Those who rely on works of the law are, shock, under a curse. Hang on, Paul.

Are you saying, Paul, that God curses good people? Are you saying that God curses people who pay attention to God's law?

Who make an effort to do it and live it out and fulfil it? Shockingly, Paul answers yes. If that all important word is there, rely.

If they rely on that. We think we can do it, don't we? We sort of fudge the CV. Because of what we imagine God's law to be like.

[5 : 27] Yeah, we know we're not perfect. But we're mostly okay. We've done good bits as well as bad bits. And so we don't feel guilty. But the problem is, Paul says, God's law doesn't come in bits.

It comes as an integral whole. It is one thing. Verse 10 again. Everyone who does not abide by, and there's the key word, all things in the law are under a curse.

He says later in chapter 5, every man who accepts circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law. And that's the problem, isn't it?

That is why we and people around us don't feel guilty. And yet they can still be guilty before God. I haven't stolen anything.

But you have envied. I haven't got a divorce. I've remained sexually pure throughout my whole life. But you have lusted. I've been a good friend to people.

[6 : 35] But you haven't loved your enemies. I've worshipped God. But you've said how and when. You see, you can't do the law in bits.

You remember the story of the Titanic. The problem with the Titanic and the disaster that happened was that the surface appearances were very different to the hidden realities, weren't they?

After the iceberg hit, the danger was there in reality. But as the champagne flowed and the music played on the surface of the upper decks, the passengers in their suits and their gowns paid no attention to the panic down below.

All they could see was the civility and the politeness and the niceties and the beauty of the surface things. And of course, once they knew the reality, once they knew they were doomed, they ran for the life poach.

But it's as if the Galatians carry on in denial. Carrying on as if a religious gloss and the veneer of good behaviour can mend the problem.

[7 : 42] But bits don't work. If we take a moment to really think what we are attempting. If we think about what God's law is.

God's law searches every aspect of our being. Not just the times when we don't disobey God. But the times that we do obey Him positively.

And that we want to. And that we love to. And that we never love sin in any way. God's law demands every aspect of our humanity to align with His holiness.

And so if you obey to belong, you are inviting God's law to search every floor and every cabin of your being.

Through all of your possessions. Through all of your past. To replay everything you've done and thought and said. It's no wonder Paul calls them foolish, isn't it?

[8 : 43] Foolish Galatians. He says it twice. If you obey to belong. You're saying to God, please judge me. And judge everything there is about me.

According to your law. And after asking him to do that. Imagining that that is going to work out okay in your favour. You might not feel guilty. But that would soon change, wouldn't it?

In reality, we can fill out what Paul means to rely on works of the law in verse 10 for ourselves. Let's try and do it. Let's follow the thought pattern.

We ask God, don't we? How do I belong to you? What can I do or say that will make you love me? I know. I'll have a good week with my temper.

I'll go for longer in prayer. I'll do morning and evening services on a Sunday. I'll do more Bible. I'll be nice and I'll be good.

[9 : 45] And even though secretly I know that those things won't wash. I'll carry on doing them. And when I fail, I know that they'll crush me. But I'll keep doing that. And in my heart, I'll pray to God to notice me on that basis.

And the awful thing is that God might answer that prayer. It is the danger of false assurance, isn't it? To feel like we might be completely blessed by God.

Relying on works. Of having a good week. Whilst in reality remaining completely cursed by God. And so it's dangerous work, Paul warns.

To not feel guilty, but be guilty relying on our own works. But secondly, there's another extreme. There's a flip side to all of this.

You might feel guilty, feel not guilty and be guilty. But if you rely on works of the law, there might be something else going on as well. In that you might feel guilty whilst not being guilty.

[10:52] If that makes sense. If you obey to belong, then you quickly discover where that leads, don't you? It's just exhausting. It leads to a cycle of guilt and a failure.

If you start a relationship with God. And the starting point is law and obedience. Then the pattern is certain.

Law will lead to guilt. And guilt will lead to more struggle. And struggle will lead to failure. Failure will lead to more guilt. And it will be a downward spiral if you start there.

But Paul writes to the Galatians to break that circle of theying to belong. Because the fact is they already do.

They belong. They belong by faith in Jesus Christ alone. There is false assurance, isn't there, when we think we're okay.

[11:54] Based on our own performance. But there is weak assurance as well for a true Christian. Maybe that's more like you today. Maybe you feel guilty when actually in Christ, God says you no longer are.

And you are free from the demands you once feared. But we really struggle with that, don't we? We sense that there is a debt which has to be paid.

So can we be free? Really? The reality is God has what we need but don't deserve blessing. And the only thing that we have is what God hates and rejects.

Sin. So in verse 13 come those really unexpected words. And if you think about it, they are just almost incredible. Verse 13.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse. Paul is saying that there is a way of getting out of this curse. Of the debt being cancelled. He goes on by becoming a curse for us.

[13:01] That even if we feel guilty, God could say of us, not guilty. He removes the curse by bearing the curse himself.

In human history we admire any display of sacrificial heroism, don't we? The story goes of the Polish monk Maximilian Kolber who was incarcerated in Auschwitz.

And when a number of prisoners were selected to be executed, one of them shouted that he was married with children. And overhearing, Kolber quickly stepped forward and requested that he take the place of the condemned man.

And his offer was accepted. He swapped places. And he was locked in an underground cell and left to starve to death. That was a substitution, wasn't it?

He took the condemnation due to the other. And we admire that. We admire stories of that. But, do you know, the problem with that story and all other human examples like that is that they just pale into insignificance in comparison with Christ's swapping with us and his substitution.

[14:21] Paul says he became a curse for us. Meaning to become a cursed one in our stead.

The agony and the suffering of that for Jesus Christ. Folks, it's simply beyond our understanding. The depths of his pain in that experience under the curse of God.

Not just on behalf of one person. But for all his people. It is so deep. It's like a child. Someone illustrates it like this. It's like a child throwing a stone into a dark cavity.

And never hearing the stone hit the ground. That's how deep the suffering was. That without any disagreement of his will with his Father in Heaven, he would ask, Father, if it be possible, let this cup from me.

It was a suffering that no other human misery, however painful, could compare to. Not even close. And so what we need to understand is that God has not just written off the debt.

[15:38] There is no payment demanded from you. No curse upon you. But there is a curse. And there is a payment. Freedom from the curse is available.

And it's free to you, but only at the point of use. It's like, isn't it, when you get your prescription from the NHS or you see the doctor if you can get an appointment.

You don't pay for it, do you? No one asks when you go for a check-up, just make sure your checkbook's here. It's free. But at the point of use.

Because it has been paid for. And no one will ask you to pay again. And so he pays. He is cursed so that you and I don't have to be.

And we shouldn't try to be either. Some of you will know Terry and Janet Seba who come to these talks quite often. They've got this little dog. And, yeah, they keep it at home.

[16:39] I can't remember its name. But they've got this little dog. And they've had it for a few years. And they got this dog from a pet sanctuary, you know. It was in a dog home.

And sadly it was abused by its previous owner. It was timid and fearful. So when they brought this dog home, whenever they tried to show affection to it, it sort of took it the wrong way.

And it would recoil and run into the corner of the room. That the hand that went in to stroke it was perceived as the hand that was going to strike it.

It was afraid. The previous owner had neglected and abused it. And the problem was that even though the dog was free, it thought it was still under its previous owner, didn't it?

It just couldn't get rid of the memory. It still felt cursed. And Paul says that the flip side of this doing things by the law and relying on them is that Christians feel like that, don't they?

[17:43] That we struggle to come to terms with what has happened to Jesus Christ. That our forgiveness is free, but it has been paid for.

We still think that God's curse is out there. And it's going to land on us. So we've got to obey to belong. God is angry with us and we need to make him happy.

But Paul says no, Galatians. Don't be foolish. You've been redeemed from the curse of the law. And you will never know that in your own works, only in the curse substitutes the Lord Jesus.

Just as we close, it is true that work done in the wrong way can be dangerous. They say don't operate heavy machinery if you've had a drink. Don't drive a lorry if you're sleepy.

Don't come into the building south site without a hard hat on. And it's the same for being a Christian. Don't come into Christianity. Don't be a Christian.

[18:52] If you're going to rely on works of the law. That is dangerous. Because it might feel nice. And it might feel like you're blessed to do that.

It might feel like that you can deal with your guilt feelings. But in reality, Paul warns that actually you'd remain under the curse of God. But Christians who are saved from that are to work for God. But not to belong. Because you already do. You're to work not because you feel guilty. Because God says in Christ, you are not guilty.

Let's pray.