Justified by Faith

Galatians 3:1-25
Key Verse: Galatians 3:24
“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

Have you ever asked yourself, “How do I know if I’m truly saved?” Have you ever had doubts about your salvation? “How do I know if I am right with God?” “Am I doing the right things, am I living my life the right way?” “Have I done enough to please God?” God is a just God, and because we are created in His image, we all were born with a sense of justice. When something goes wrong, we demand justice. When someone breaks into your house and steals your things, you want to find out who did it and put him in jail. When a government official is found accepting bribes and stealing money, we want him brought to justice. When justice is done, the situation is made right; it is justified. To be justified is to be declared righteous, to be made perfectly good. Because God is just, it is necessary that we should also be just – but who can say they are perfectly good? Who can self-declare that they are righteous? Only God can justify you, and you can only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Galatian churches had departed from this truth, they had turned from obedience to Christ to obedience to Jewish traditions, and required their church members to be circumcised and practice Jewish ceremonial customs in order to be saved. Look at v.1, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.” Notice his change in tone. In Gal 1:11, Paul says, “I want you to know, brothers,” but in this chapter he doesn’t address them as brothers, he calls them “foolish Galatians.” Paul has become very strong with them, and rebukes them harshly in order to break them away from under the influence and deception of the false teachers. He asks, them, “Who has bewitched you?” When Paul first preached to them, they welcomed him as if he were an angel of God, as if he were Christ Jesus himself. They were so full of joy, and Paul can testify, if they could have done so, they would have even torn out their eyes and given them to him. Now they were like enemies to Paul, and he tries to cut them to the heart.

He tells them, “Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.” When he preached the true gospel to them, they put their faith in Christ crucified for their salvation, but now he judges them because he points out that they have rejected this truth. To them, faith in Christ alone was no longer enough, they also had to follow Jewish traditions to be saved. Heb 10:29 says, “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace.” The Galatians received the gospel, but they trampled the Son of God underfoot by adding human traditions to “enhance” God’s work, but by doing this they insulted the Spirit of grace. Paul could not just sit idly by as his brothers were heading down a dangerous path, so he pleaded with them using strong language, rebuking their error and teaching them the truth.

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Look at v.2-3, “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?” Msn. Deborah Kim gave a message last year about the Holy Spirit’s power in sharing Jesus, and if I may quote from that message, she writes, “Without the Holy Spirit, witnessing about Jesus will be like driving the car with the engine turned off. No power.” I think it is a good analogy. Now imagine if you took the engine out of that car, then took the bottom off, and you drove the car like they do in the Flintstones, with your feet. It might take some of you who come from the north side 6 hours to get here, and you might have to ride on the shoulder lane of the highway, because you’ll be going at around a maximum of about 3 miles per hour. That is foolishness, some would say sheer stupidity, and that’s what Paul was rebuking the Galatians for here. They had with them the power of God, the awesome and mighty Spirit of God enabling them to work miracles and wonders, but now they replaced the Spirit’s power with human effort.

What’s even worse is that if you continue in human effort, then you throw away everything you have received. All the money you saved up, or the payments you’ve made on the car, the oil changes, the modifications to the engine – if you take the engine out, it’s all for nothing. You might as well have not bought the car. Look at v.4 – “Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing?” The Galatians must have suffered a lot initially as they became Christians. They might have had to suffer persecution from their families, leave their old lives of pagan worship, lost jobs, and they were also in danger of persecution from the Pharisees who were hunting Christians like animals. All their sufferings came from their faith, but now that they have given up on their faith, what was all that for? All of Paul’s questions were designed to show them their folly, and bring them back to their first love, the faith they knew at the beginning.

Look at v.5, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” The answer to this question is obvious, but notice where their faith came from. “Because they believed what they heard.” Rom 10:17 says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Faith comes from believing the gospel that was preached. In 2 Tim 4:2, Paul gave Timothy this charge: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” And Jesus told his disciples before he ascended to heaven in Luke 24:47, “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Here we can see that the duty of the Christian is to faithfully preach the gospel, but the work of salvation belongs to God. Salvation does not come from any formula or human effort, but comes when God moves the heart of the hearer of the true gospel and gives them faith. After Paul shows the Galatians their great error, he shows them the correct way, and commends them to faith.

Abraham is used as an example of justification by faith and an encouragement to faith in v.6-9. Verse 6 says, “Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” Abraham had an unwavering faith in the word of God. In Gen 15:5-6, God took

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Abraham outside and said, “Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abraham was more than 75 years old at the time, but he “believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” In Gen 22, Abraham was tested – God asked him to sacrifice his only son, born to him when he was 100 years old. Though God asked him to sacrifice his son, he believed in God’s promise and reasoned that God could raise his son from the dead (Heb 11:19). Just as he was about to take a knife and slay his son, an angel of the Lord stopped him and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore ... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me. (Gen 22:15-18).” Because of his faith, Abraham was blessed, and by faith, we are the children of Abraham that God had promised to him, and we are blessed along with Abraham by faith.

Paul goes on to further show how the law cannot justify and how faith can. Look at v.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.’” The law was given for 2 reasons, 1. To control behavior, and 2. To convict us of sin. Without laws, there would be chaos, total anarchy in the nation. We have laws in our nation framed in the constitution of the United States – these laws keep things in order. At work every few months we have to go through a rigorous audit of our computer systems to ensure that we are compliant with federal standards for security and privacy, and if we don’t meet those standards, the whole business could be shut down or fined until we comply. Though these rules seem like such a hassle and a waste of time, they ensure that customer information is secure, and protects the customer. Similarly, the laws at in the time of Moses were given to the Israelites, to be a people separated to God in which the Savior of the world was to come.

That second reason for the law, to convict us of sin, is more important, and it is the spiritual aspect of God’s law. We know the Law as the Ten Commandments: You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make for yourself an idol, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not covet. These laws reveal the mind of God, they are the standard to what is right and just, they show us what pleases the Lord and how to be blessed. We will be blessed if we do them continually, but again in v.10, the converse is true: anyone who does not observe all of these laws continually are cursed. Who can say they have kept all 10 commandments perfectly? I guarantee not a single person here can say that. Some of you don’t remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Some of you don’t honor your mother and father. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Who can keep these laws? It is impossible, but what does this mean for us? It means that we are all guilty, we are all lawbreakers, offenders against the righteousness of God. It means that we are all cursed, condemned and each of us await punishment. You may still object, it’s not my fault, I can’t help it that I’m a sinner – but that’s exactly what the Law reveals: that you are a sinner under a curse.

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What are we to do? What can we do? We need a Savior, someone to save us! Who will that be? Can we all please read v.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.’” God knows our weakness, he is not surprised by the fact that we are sinners, yet we grieve him daily by our sins. Our sinful natures naturally hate God, because the pride within us makes us want to be our own gods. Therefore, God, because he is just, must punish us, but he take no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze 18:32). So he found a way to redeem us. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus Christ is God’s Son, He is the sinless one, the Holy one. He is the one who can observe all the laws and obey God perfectly because he is without sin. Heb 10:7 talks about Him: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, “Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.” God was pleased to sacrifice His one and only Son for our sins. He poured out the entire contents of his wrath, stored up for each of us, and inflicted them all on Christ. Christ was crucified, hung on a tree and became a curse, for us, to redeem us from our curse. God, who is just, poured out his justice on His Son, so that He could justify us.

The way to justification is through Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law by dying on the cross. Because he took the punishment for our sins, it is in Him that we have the forgiveness of sins. Christ fulfilled the Law for us, if we choose to go down the path of the law, as the Galatians did, we will find only a curse and death. We have 2 options to live by, look at v.11 and 12: “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.” Those who are cursed will live by the law, but the righteous will live by faith. What does that mean, to live by faith? On the one hand, it means that by our faith, God will bless us with life, life to the full and eternal life. When we have faith in Jesus and believe that he died for the forgiveness of our sins, then we are forgiven by God, made right with Him, and granted eternal life. On the other hand, it also means we live daily by faith in God, in accordance with the Scriptures. People always have faith, whether it’s in God or not, whether they know it or not. Even atheists have faith in their non-god. The standard to which we live our faith is in accordance with the Scriptures. To have faith in God is to believe that He exists, and that He is who He is: the Creator, the Most High God, and that He dwells in the heavens as well as in our hearts. If he lives in our hearts, we do not neglect Him, but seek to know Him more day by day.

In this next section from v.15-25, Paul puts the law in its proper place. It’s important to understand that while we do not live by the law, it still has an important role to play in our sanctification. Sanctification is the process of being made holy, set apart for God. When we receive Christ, we are declared righteous, we have a stamp, a seal of approval in the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), but we still live in the flesh. While we still live here on earth, until Jesus comes again, we will continually struggle between Spirit and flesh. Paul says in Rom 7:21-23, “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and

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making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." Martin Luther writes, "I want to encourage all who fear God, especially those who intend to become ministers of the Gospel, to learn from the Apostle the proper use of the Law. I fear that after our time the right handling of the Law will become a lost art...Happy the person who knows how to utilize the Law so that it serves the purposes of grace and faith." So let's learn from Paul the proper place of the law, and that is subordinate and subservient to faith.

Look at v.15, "Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case." A covenant is defined as an agreement that brings about a commitment of a relationship, like a promise, but a promise that cannot or must not be broken. Let's take marriage as an example. A marriage is a covenant, and no one can set aside or add to this covenant. After Mary and I are married, 3 years later I cannot say, "If you want to remain married to me, you will need to do this and this and this." Nope, I'm married for life. In v.16-17, Paul writes about the promise God made to Abraham and to his seed, who is Christ. Christ is emphasized here, so that there is no confusion, not all of Abraham's children are children of the promise, but only those who are through Christ. One of the promises God made to Abraham was "All nations will be blessed through you." The law, introduced 430 years later, does not void or nullify the promise.

Look at v.19-20, "What then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one." The promise was put into effect by God, the law was put into effect by those lower than God – by angels and a mediator, who was Moses. The law needed a mediator, someone to be between God and the people, so by the law. This shows that the law cannot justify, because there always needs to be a mediator between men and God, whether it was Moses, or Jesus. However, the promise, made by God, does not need a mediator – He is the one who made the promise.

Verse 21 says, "Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." We have seen thus far, that the law cannot void the promise, it is not opposed to the promise, it cannot justify, and it cannot impart life. Finally we see another function of the law, can we read v.23-24: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." The last and final purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ. The law puts us in a prison, it helps us to acknowledge that we're sinners, and intensifies the conviction of our sins so that we desperately desire a Savior.

We must allow ourselves to come under a conviction of the law, to know that we need the Lord. Sometimes we have denied our consciences, and tried to justify an act of disobedience. "Oh, I don't need to go to church today, I'll go next week." "I'll pray tomorrow, it'll be allright." And we ignore the ringing conscience that tells us the right thing to do. What happens is that we sear our

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consciences and make them more and more numb to God's leading. We need the law, without it we will have no restraint, and become reckless, even in our "faith." The law must put us into the prison of God's judgment, it should intensify our conviction of sin and drive us to desire a Savior. The law will put us into a prison, and threaten us with God's wrath, eternal hell and punishment ... from there we repent of our sins and put our trust in Jesus Christ, the promise of God given for the forgiveness of my sins. If we do not turn to Christ, we will be crushed and tormented – the law must lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. By faith in Jesus Christ we will receive the blessings, inheritance, and God's own Spirit as promised to Abraham.

So the question comes back, how do we know if we are saved? Are we right before God? Are we doing the right things? The answer to that is, that we must live by faith. Heb 10:16 says, "'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' Then he adds, 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.'" When we live by faith, God's law will guide us. (From Luther's commentary on Galatians) There are seasons of law and seasons of the gospel. The seasons of the law are marked by heaviness of sin, conviction and guilt. The seasons of the gospel are marked by confidence in the Lord and His promises, we have these seasons in different times. When we use the law, we don't abuse it and become self-righteous and proud. We don't ignore it when it comes upon us. And when the law makes us prisoner, we must not forget to turn to Christ, or we will be crushed and burned by the law. The proper way to use the law is to be aware of its convictions and its limitations, knowing that Christ is better than the law, and throwing, flinging yourself to Christ who justifies.

To close I'd like to share a personal testimony. My wife and I have morning and evening devotionals, and there was one time we were studying Isaiah. I was getting excited about the passage, but noticed her face was downcast. Yet I kept going on in the verses, and asking her questions, until she confessed, "Right now, all I can think about is my eye." Her left eye had been hurting for a long time, to the point she could not open it. It was there I just shut up, clammed up, and I could feel the anger begin to rise up inside me. Going through my mind were thoughts like, "Why can't she enjoy the passage, what am I supposed to do, I can't force her and say, you better love the study!" I felt like rebuking her, but as I kept thinking, I was convicted of my sins. The Bible says, "Love your wife as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25)," and I realized I was not loving my wife, and new thoughts came in my mind like, "Are you trying to drag her along with you? Why are you putting such a burden on your wife? Can you find a better time or way to study? You don't always come to me (God) perfectly, yet I still love you and am gracious to you. Be gracious to your wife." It was at that point I humbled myself, crucified my own sinful desires, and turned to Christ and my wife for forgiveness.

The result, peace and understanding came to our devotional time, by God's grace I became more gracious and flexible, more loving, and by His grace my wife's enthusiasm in devotions grew. Had I enforced the law and put my wife under burden, the devotionals would have suffered. Had I ignored the law and rebuked my wife, devotionals also would have suffered. But when I died to

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myself, so that I might crucify my sins and turn to Christ for forgiveness, guidance and direction, our devotionals have become even more enjoyable. Seasons of the law and seasons of the gospel come at times unexpected, but the work of the law is to lead us to Christ, who will increase our faith and help us to obey, so that Christ in me will help me fulfill the law and be justified in the sight of God. Thank God for His one and only Son, who became a curse for us to redeem us from the curse, so that we may be justified by faith.

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