

Christ Redeemed Us
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 pole.'"

In chapters 1 and 2 Paul defended the authenticity of his apostleship and the gospel he preached among the Gentiles. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul declares that we become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. To help us understand this, Paul develops his theme through several contrasts: faith versus observing the law (3:1-14), the promise versus the law (3:15-22), and children versus slaves (3:23-4:31). In today's passage Paul speaks to the Galatians directly, addressing their problem. They had received the Spirit by believing the gospel. But after receiving this blessing, they tried to keep the law of Moses in order to maintain it. Inevitably, they would be cursed. Paul rebuked them so that they might continue to live by faith, not by the law.

After becoming Christians, many people attempt to keep the law instead of continuing in faith. They want to do something for God in the strength of the flesh. If they seem to succeed, they become self-righteous and very proud. When they fail they fall into a sense of condemnation. Their service to God is burdensome and futile; they have little joy or peace in their hearts. In the long run, they feel that their life is cursed. On the other hand, there are those who live by faith. They always remember what Jesus has done for them. Based on the grace of Jesus, they serve God through the help of the Holy Spirit. They are humble, willing, thankful, joyful and fruitful. This is the blessed life. Today let's learn how to live a blessed life.

I. By faith, not by works of the law (1-9)

In verse 1 Paul rebuked the Galatians to bring them back to faith in the gospel. To help them, in verses 2-5, he reminded them of their personal experience. Then, in verses 6-9, he drew upon Abraham's example.

Look at verse 1a. "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" The Message Bible says, "You crazy Galatians!" The Amplified Bible reads, "O you poor and silly and thoughtless and unreflecting and senseless Galatians!" Paul rebukes the Galatians for betraying gospel faith under the bad influence of false teachers. He did not excuse them because they were young. He rebuked them sharply to help them discern the truth and muster the courage to stand on gospel faith. The word "bewitched" indicates that the devil had gripped them. The devil has been a liar and murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44). The devil intended to destroy the souls of the Galatians

To set them free from the devil, Paul reminded them of the gospel. Look at verse 1b. "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified." Paul's message to the Galatians focused on Christ crucified. When Paul preached this, the Galatians felt they were watching Christ being crucified before their very eyes. Historically, Jesus' crucifixion had taken place some 15 years earlier. But they felt that it was happening

right then, before their very eyes. Here we see that Jesus' crucifixion is not just a historical event, but it is like a fountain that flows continually. It was effective for the Galatians and continues to be effective throughout time. Why is this so? On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). The original text uses the perfect tense, which expresses that action completed in the past has accomplished something for all time. After his death on the cross, Christ rose again to life. This proves that his death was acceptable to God as the perfect sacrifice (Ro 4:25). Furthermore, Christ is living. Christ obtained eternal redemption through his death and resurrection (Heb 9:12). This is why his atoning sacrifice is effective to all who believe. It was effective 2,000 years ago, and in the Galatians' time, and it is in our time. Christ's offering has power now to forgive our sins and save us from eternal condemnation. Every Easter conference, "Christ crucified for our sins" is proclaimed. Many people experience Christ's death for them personally and receive Jesus with tears. The cross of Jesus has power to forgive our sins. As we proclaim the cross of Christ it works mightily in people of our times. We need only to believe this gospel. How did Paul bring the Galatians back to this gospel?

First, Paul reminded them of their personal experience (2-5). In verses 2-5 Paul asked several questions, progressively, to remind them of how God had worked in their lives. In verse 2 he asked, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?" The book of Acts reveals that as the apostles preached the gospel, people believed the message and received the Holy Spirit; they were changed into new persons (Ac 2:38; 8:15-17; 10:15; 13:48,52). The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in those who believe the gospel message. The Holy Spirit changes us into a new creation. This does not happen by observing the law, but by believing the gospel.

In verse 3 Paul asked, "After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" The Galatians had received the Spirit by believing. However, when they heard they should be circumcised and obey the law, they agreed. They thought they could progress in sanctification by keeping the law. Paul called them foolish. As they had begun by faith, so they needed to continue by faith. It is God who sanctifies us by faith alone (1 Th 5:23; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pe 1:2). Some people start with faith in Jesus, then try to be sanctified by works of the flesh. Paul says it is foolish. Romans 1:17 says, "...the righteous will live by faith from first to last." Hebrews 11:6a says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God...."

In verse 4 Paul asked, "Have you experienced so much in vain--if it really was in vain?" This refers to the persecution the Galatians received. It came from legalistic Jews who opposed gospel ministry. It also came from fellow Gentiles who felt condemned by the Christians' holy lives. The Galatians suffered a lot from persecution. But they knew it was meaningful and valuable. It purified their faith and helped them take root in Christ; they grew spiritually. When we live godly lives by faith, persecution will follow from ungodly people (2 Tim 3:12). However, God uses it for our good and it is part of the blessed life (Mt 5:10-12).

In verse 5 Paul asked, "...does God work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?" When Paul was in Galatia, the Lord confirmed his

message by enabling him to do miraculous signs and wonders (Ac 14:3). God's power is experienced by faith, not by observing the law. Jesus healed those who had faith (Mk 5:34; 10:53). A zealous Muslim woman in a Muslim country became terribly sick. No one could heal her--not physicians or the local witch doctor. But when she called on the name of Jesus she was healed. She later accepted Christ as her Savior. When we simply believe in Jesus we experience God's almighty power. Through several rhetorical questions, Paul helped the Galatians remember that God worked mightily in their lives through their faith, not by their observing the law. Paul helped them realize that God is pleased by faith, not by works of the flesh. Christians live by faith alone, from the first to the last.

Second, Paul presented Abraham as an example of faith (6-9). Abraham was the father of the nation Israel. No one could refute Abraham's example. In Abraham's time, God had not yet given his law. Abraham was justified by faith. Look at verse 6. "So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." This is a quote from Genesis 15:6. At that time, Abraham had hit rock-bottom. Even though he had lived by faith for ten years he had no visible fruit. God promised to make him into a great nation. But in reality, he had no son, no heir. After fighting a war to rescue Lot, he had many enemies. So he was fearful. At the same time, he had a sense of loss. God comforted him in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abraham responded by complaining, "What can you give me since I remain childless." How did God help him? Did God give him a son right away? No. Instead, God planted faith in him. God took him outside and said, "Look at the stars...so shall your offspring be." God's promise was so great that it seemed irrational and ridiculous. How could Abraham believe such a great promise? Mysteriously, however, Abraham believed the Lord. Then the Lord credited it to him as righteousness. Abraham did not achieve something great. He hadn't raised any disciples. And he had made many mistakes. But he believed the Lord. He regarded God as God. He fully trusted that with man it was impossible, but with God it was possible. Then God was pleased and gave Abraham an A+. Here we learn that God is pleased by faith, not by works of the law. In verse 7, Paul related Abraham's faith to the Galatians. Those who have faith in God like Abraham did are the children of Abraham. Abraham's descendants are not primarily his physical descendants, but those who have the same faith.

In verse 8, Paul quoted Genesis 12:3 and 22:18: "All nations on earth will be blessed through you." And he said, "Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." Paul revealed God's plan to the Galatians. From the beginning it was to bless the Gentiles with the gospel of forgiveness through faith. God was not exclusively the God of the Jews, but the God of the Gentiles, also. Those who rely on faith like Abraham did are blessed along with Abraham (9). Paul wanted the Galatians to know that God accepted them as his children by their faith. They were just as much a part of God's family as Jewish believers. Here we learn that God sees and blesses faith, not works of the law. There is a very handsome young man who grew up in a devout Christian home. From watching his saintly mother, he concluded that Christian life meant early-morning prayer, testimony writing, inviting students to Bible study and teaching the Bible. He thought that if he did these things he would be saved.

But he could not overcome his pride, selfishness, and lust. He once accepted Jesus' death for his sins and found freedom for a short time. But soon he felt pressed to do the things he had done before. He became busy and forgot the gospel. Then he committed a sin that hurt others and grieved him deeply. He felt completely condemned. But when he admitted he was a helpless sinner and came to God for grace, the blood of Jesus cleansed him. He tasted a spiritual joy and peace he had never known before. Now he wants to live each day in the grace of Jesus, by faith in Christ alone. As he does, he is motivated by love to share Christ with others. When we just believe the gospel, God forgives all our sins and makes us his precious children. What a great blessing! How could this happen?

II. Blessed through faith in Christ, not cursed under the law (10-14).

In verses 10-12 Paul quoted Old Testament references to explain that there are two ways to seek righteousness. He quoted Habbakuk 2:4, which says, "the righteous will live by faith," and Leviticus 18:5, which says, "the person who does these things will live by them." Both are the words of God and promise us eternal life. But the roadways are different. The first way to eternal life is to have a right relationship with God by faith. The second way to eternal life is to keep the law. What is the problem? The problem is we cannot keep the law in order to have eternal life. Verse 10 says, "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26. Here we can find the nature of the law. The law demands perfect obedience. We cannot pick what we like to obey and discard what we dislike. We have to obey all the laws of God without fail. Mr. Law is a perfectionist. He is tall and handsome, with a perfect physique, and is disciplined, intelligent, and a master of all trades. So, many women are eager to marry him. But after the wedding they experience a very painful reality. Every morning he gets up at 4:00 a.m., reads the Bible and prays. He works hard twelve hours a day, keeps time precisely, and never makes a mistake. He does so without fail. And he demands his wife to do so. If she fails to do one small thing, he condemns her without mercy. This goes on every day, day after day, without ceasing. Can anyone bear being married to Mr. Law? Even though one keeps 99% of the law, if he breaks one law, he becomes a lawbreaker. Paul shared his testimony in Romans 7. He kept most commandments. However, the commandment, "Do not covet," which deals with the inner life, convicted him of sin. Because he had broken this one law, he became like one who broke all the laws. He was condemned and destined to die. So he cried out, "What a wretched man I am!"

Paul continued to talk about the nature of the law in verse 12. It says, "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, 'The person 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. And when we fail to keep even one of God's laws, it brings curse upon us. We are condemned without mercy and receive a death penalty. God is holy. There is no exception. Whether Jew or Gentile, all are under a curse because of disobedience to the law of God. But God is love. In his great mercy, he provided a way for us to be saved. He sent his one and only Son Jesus as our Redeemer. What did Christ do for us?

Let's 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 pole.'" Simply speaking, to redeem is to pay the price to free a slave. Because of disobedience all men became slaves of sin. There was no way out without paying the full price for our sins. Jesus paid it all for us. Jesus, who is in very nature God, kept all the law perfectly from beginning to end. Jesus was sinless. But he was condemned and crucified as a criminal. Why was he crucified? It was for our sins. He became a curse in our places. Isaiah cried out: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities" (Isa 53:4-5). 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Because of his death on the cross, we are redeemed from the curse of the law. Those who rely on what Jesus has done are freed from the curse of the law to live a new life. Paul declared in Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!

Verse 14 tells us the result of Christ's redemption: "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." Here Paul concludes his argument. The Galatian believers did receive the Spirit. They did so through faith. This fulfilled the promise of blessing given to Abraham. This blessing of the Spirit comes only through faith in Christ, not by works of the law. The Spirit dwells in us and guides us. We can bear inner fruit, such as love, joy and peace. Christ redeems us from the curse of the law, and brings us under the blessing of God. Under the curse of the law everything seemed to work against us and end in failure. We always felt condemnation and guilt. There was no hope or peace. However, when we live under the blessing of God, everything goes well. We enjoy real peace and bright hope for the future because God works for our good. This is not a theory, but reality. One person I know received the gospel and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. Then he went off to live in his own way. He thought he would be free. But he fell under the power of sin and a terrible curse. His life was about to end in disaster. Then he remembered God's word and cried out to Jesus. Miraculously he was saved. Jesus changed his destiny from curse to blessing. Christ redeemed him from the curse of the law. Just believing in Christ changes our destiny from a cursed life to a blessed life.

Today we learned that we are saved from sin and condemnation when we believe the gospel, not by works. After being saved, we should continue to live by faith, depending on what Christ has done for us. We don't need to do something for God to maintain salvation. We live by faith. We only trust Christ from beginning to end. This is the gospel, and the Christian life. This is the blessed life. May God bless you when you live by faith in Christ alone.

In chapters 3 and 4 Paul's main theme is that we become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, not by observing the law. To help us understand, Paul develops this theme with several contrasts: faith versus observing the law (3:1--14), the promise versus the law (3:15--22), and children versus slaves (3:23--4:31). In the first part of chapter 3 Paul explains how Christ redeemed us, and that by believing, we receive the promise of the Spirit and the blessing given to Abraham.