

Paul has been addressing the issue of the Galatians turning from the gospel of grace to trusting in the law. He first used his own experience as an example. It was grace alone that turned him from persecutor to proclaimer. He told how the apostles had confirmed the validity of what he taught and his confrontation with Peter over the issue. Then in verse six he moved to the scriptural basis for his argument with the example of how Abraham was made righteous simply by believing God's promise. In our text for today he continues by using the law to show that by trusting in the law we put ourselves under a curse.

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." Galatians 3:10 These five verses we are looking at today explain from the Torah, the books of the law, why the law cannot save us- and explains how the law shows that Jesus can save us. He begins with an important point that to have the blessings of the law, which by the way was mostly physical in nature, we have to obey it all. If we fail in one point, we put ourselves under a curse. Jews realized how impossible it was. Some Jews even suggest that if just ten men could keep it all, the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom. Jesus made it abundantly clear when He expounded on the law that no one is able to keep the whole law for God considers the thoughts of the heart as having done the deed (Matthew 5:28ⁱ). Nor does anyone honor God as He deserves to be honored as the highest priority of life. Trying to be right by God's standards will have us always coming up short (Deuteronomy 27:26ⁱⁱ).

Why was the age of the law necessary? It is because one of our most detrimental tendencies is to think we can be good enough for God. We are blinded by our pride. God had to make it abundantly clear that we fall way short of His glory. That was the main purpose of the law. We acknowledge the law is right, but we also know that we just cannot keep it. Therefore, we know we are under the condemnation of the law. If we fail in one point, we have failed in all, and the soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:4ⁱⁱⁱ)! That is the curse of the law.

Recently a quote from a Soviet judge has been frequently cited. "Show me the man and I'll show you the crime." In other words, there are so many laws, if we hold everyone to every detail of them, we can convict anyone. That was one reason so many Jews in Jesus day did not even try. The religious people called those who made no attempt to keep the law "sinners." It was those people Jesus frequently reached out to because they were aware they could not keep the law.

Allow me to give you an example. The Ten Commandments tell us not to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor (Exodus 20:17ⁱⁱⁱ). That means that in your heart you wish you had his wife, or his car, or his house, or his children, or his perfect lawn, or whatever God has blessed him with you are violating God's command. In the church we have spiritual covetousness. While we are to desire the best gifts (1 Corinthians 14:12^{iv}), to be envious of what God has given a brother or sister can break the tenth commandment. "I wish God gave me that gift. Why did God give it to that person? They are so weak! I would do a better job of handling it." This is to say God made a mistake and you are better than that person. Who has never coveted something that was not

theirs? We are all guilty of breaking God's laws and not honoring Him as we should. We are condemned by the law.

That exists to curb bad behavior and convict those who violate it. No one comes to a judge and says, "Yes I ran the red light, but I have stopped for red lights a thousand times, so that should be considered." That is not the way it works. The law does not give you credit for doing what you should do. It is there to punish you for not being compliant. The Laws of Moses are only slightly different in that they promise a physical blessing for obedience and life for total obedience. But like our legal system, it does not count your good deeds when you are convicted of disobedience. That is the curse that Paul is talking about. The law condemns us! That is why Paul was so excited to conclude at the beginning of Romans 8 that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1^v). Hallelujah! You should breathe a huge sigh of relief.

So then why did Paul do many things written in the law such as worship in the temple and make vows according to the law (Acts 21:26^{vi})? He was not relying on the law for salvation or thinking it merited God's favor. He knew it was delivered by God as a guideline of His requirements which serves to convict all of sin and push them toward faith in God's mercy received through the coming Messiah. He knew he was free to do as the Spirit led even when it contradicted the law, such as eating non-kosher food with Gentile brothers and sisters as we saw in the previous chapter.

Pastor Todd Wilson explains, *"In order for the Law to bless, the Law must be kept. But this is where Israel fell short. She did not keep the Law. If she would have, as Leviticus 18:5^{vii} says, then, to be sure, she would have found life through the Law. But she did not; so, she received the curse of the Law and thus death through the Law. And this eventuated in her being exiled out of the land of promise and scattered among the nations.*

The main point of these three verses (10-12), then, is simply this: Israel is under the curse of the Law; and so too are all who depend on the works of the Law. Yet this is not only a statement of historical fact; it's also a warning to anyone who, like the Galatians, thinks that the Law itself is the pathway to blessing or the way to life." ^{viii}

¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." Galatians 3:11 The Jews in the Talmud have the saying, "The whole law was given to Moses at Sinai, in six hundred and thirteen precepts." David, in the fifteenth Psalm, brings them all within the compass of eleven. Isaiah brings them to six (Isaiah 33:15^{ix}); Micah to three (Micah 6:8^x); Isaiah, again, to two (Isaiah 56); Habakkuk to this one, "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). ^{xi}

Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4.^{xii} It is such a key verse that he repeats it in Romans 1:17^{xiii} and it is referenced in Hebrews 10:38^{xiv}. When you see a scripture that is repeated, know that it is very important. If you did not get it in the original passage, we are supposed to get it in the next one. And if we did not get it then, we should certainly get it when it is repeated again and again. The same is true of godly principles that are repeated. Pay extra attention to repeated words and themes in Scripture.

The law never declared that it made people righteous, but the law and prophets and psalms declare that faith does (Genesis 15:6^{xv}; Psalm 32:5^{xvi}; Psalm 106:30,31^{xvii}). These facts clear up any question as to whether salvation (which is to be righteousness in God's eyes) is by the law or by faith. The law created legalistic Pharisees and uptight Essenes. **Faith creates humbly grateful, redeemed sinners.** Instead of pointing at others

and declaring how grateful we are that we are not like them, we cry out with gratitude that though we were like them and sometimes still are, God had mercy on us. And we pray God has mercy on them as He has on us.

Jesus illustrated this in one of his parables. The account is in Luke 11:8-13. A very religious man stood in the temple with arms raised and prayed for all to hear him. He thanked God he was not like other people who don't obey the law. He prayed that he was especially grateful for his obedience to the details of the law and that he was not like the man kneeling nearby, a despised tax-collector. The tax-collector was on his knees and beating his chest and crying, "God, please be merciful to me a sinner!" One of them proudly approached God through the law and the other by faith in God's mercy. Jesus said that the one who went away right with God was the tax collector.

Those who try to obey the law look to self-willed determination. Faith looks to the power and promises of God and expects God to fulfill His Word. The law glories in man's ability, but faith glories in the Lord. The law tends toward boasting in oneself or giving up in frustration, but faith boasts in the Lord (Psalm 34:2^{xviii}).

What does it mean that the righteous live by faith? Those who live by faith in God's Word are counted as righteous just like Abraham who believed God and it was counted to Him as righteousness. "To live" in this verse is more than a beating heart, for Jesus declared that He is Life (John 14:6^{xix}). To have life - in that Life that is Jesus - is to truly live the abundant life of the Spirit (John 10:10^{xx}). It is to see the life of Christ touching the world through us. Now hear the phrase again. The righteous shall LIVE, by faith. Are you living by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave His life for you (Galatians 2:20^{xxi})? Perhaps it is better to ask to what extent are we living by faith in the Son of God, the Word made flesh? Life in Christ is increasingly living that faith life, letting it take over all the natural tendencies and expectations until He is our all in all.

¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

Galatians 3:12 You either live by faith or you live by the law. One is counted as righteous, and the other is cursed. There is also the life of the godless that is death while they live (Ecclesiastes 9:3^{xxii}). For every one of us it is one these. That is the declaration of the Word of God. Paul is arguing from Leviticus 18:5 that if you live by the law you have to do it all (Deuteronomy 6:25^{xxiii}). (See Romans 10:5^{xxiv}) The law brings us to our knees if we are honest. It makes us realize that fallen creatures cannot live up the standards of our holy God. We could try a thousand years and even if we got it down pat by some amazing feat of careful routine and effort, what do we do with our sinful past? The ritual sacrifices only covered sin for a time and had to be repeated (Hebrews 10:1,2^{xxv}). But the law also declares the Lord is the One who sanctifies us (Exodus 31:13^{xxvi}). It does not tell us how, but it gave pictures and illustrations and symbols that are fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus used the bronze serpent in the wilderness as a picture of what He would do (John 3:14^{xxvii}). The people were murmuring against God's judgment of sending poisonous snakes among them. When Moses cried out to God for a remedy, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a staff. He set it up in the middle of the camp and whoever looked upon it was healed (Numbers 21:9^{xxviii}). That was one of dozens of pictures of how God would provide a way through faith to become righteous, to look by faith to God's provision hanging on the pole.

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 hanged on a tree”*— Galatians 3:13 Jesus took the curse that was on us because of our disobedience and the punishment those sins deserved (Deuteronomy 21:23^{xxix}). That passage in the Torah pronounced a curse on anyone who was hung on a tree. That is a strange law. What if an innocent person was hung? But then there is only one innocent Man.

Jesus had no sin and yet He was nailed to a wooden cross, the equivalent of a tree. Why would He be cursed? It is because He intentionally received our sins, the sins of all mankind throughout time, so that He might be receive the curse that would have fallen on us as verse 13 declares. If He did not willingly take our sins upon Himself, I believe God would have stopped the soldiers before they nailed Him there. He could not be cursed after living a sinless life.

Think about what that means. As He hung there in that cursed darkness, what horrors took place as God’s righteous justice for the world’s sins was dealt out to Him! Only God in the flesh could withstand all we deserve in those hours of darkness on the cross. It was so much more than physical pain, though compounded by it. We could not comprehend it if it were told to us. When that curse fell on Egypt so many years before, there was light in Goshen where the Israelites lived. But while Jesus was on the cross, the darkness fell over the Israelites as well. That was declaring that they were just as idolatrous as Egypt was when it was cursed.

And yet, I think the darkness was tinged with a blessing, for all who were there witnessing the event would have been forever traumatized had they seen what took place during that time. Most importantly, the darkness lifted. The light returned. And our Savior was victorious. He declared our debt was paid in full when He said, *“It is finished!”* John 19:30 Darkness cannot prevail. The Light of the World is victorious!

¹⁴ *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* Galatians 3:14 Why did He do that for us? It is as if a judge sentenced a man to death by the electric chair and then voluntarily took his place in that chair. Even that falls far short of the wonder of what Jesus did for us. The blessing promised to Abraham that was for the world came to us through Jesus' sacrificial act (Genesis 12:3^{xxx}).

Justification by faith in Jesus’ atoning death sanctifies in God’s eyes so that we can be vessels of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God cannot abide what is sinful. Jesus' sacrifice makes our spirit holy. That opened the way for us to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It implies eternal security; but beware of thinking you are secure when you are not yet so. That is why there is the doctrine of perseverance. We must continue in faith to the end (Matthew 10:22^{xxxi}; Hebrews 10:36^{xxxii}).

If Jesus would go through the horror of the cross and what happened in those hours of darkness that we might be considered righteous and receive the Spirit, how needful are we then of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit then prepares us experientially to be the bride of Christ. Consider that Adam's side was opened to take the rib from which to make his bride (Genesis 2:21,22^{xxxiii}). Jesus' side was pierced to make His bride, the church.

What I mean by preparing us experientially to be Jesus’ bride, is that the Holy Spirit and the Word prune our lives once we enter the new covenant (John 15:3^{xxxiv}; 16:8^{xxxv}). The Spirit and the Word point out where our lives are not like the life of our

Savior. They challenge us moment by moment to let Jesus live in and through us. That is why it is so important for us to be grounded in the Word of God, to study it, meditate upon it, and memorize it. It is the sword of the Spirit by which we do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil (Ephesians 6:17^{xxxvi}). This is what shapes us and gets us ready to be the bride of Christ. Of course, it is the grace of God working in us despite our short comings (Zechariah 4:6^{xxxvii}).

Listen to how Ephesians 5 describes it. ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ²⁶ *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* Ephesians 5:25-27 Do you see how this is saying the same thing Paul said in verse 14? He is saying our (the church's) relationship with Jesus is to be like that of a bride with her husband. The husband is to love his bride as Jesus loves us. He gave Himself for us on the cross. Why? It is not only saving us from the wrath of God on our sins. It is to sanctify us. That means to set us apart for Himself. He cleans us up by washing us with the Word of God. Why? So that He can present us to Himself without stain or wrinkle or any such thing, that we might be holy and blameless.

None of us has reached that state of perfection, but we are in process, and He promised to finish the work He has started in us (Philippians 1:6^{xxxviii}). In fact, we will even be like Him, meaning we will have His communicable attributes of love, joy, peace and all the fruits of the Spirit. And after that amazing promise, John writes that if we have this hope, then we purify ourselves even as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3^{xxxix}). We present our lives as living sacrifices and let our minds be renewed by the Word of God so that we see things as our heavenly Father and our glorious groom see them (Romans 12:1,2^{xl}).

In summation, Paul is telling all who read this letter, that to try to find life in the law is not only futile but puts us under its curse. The law tells us that is the case. But it also tells us there is righteousness that can be obtained through faith in the promised seed of Abraham, Jesus! **LIFE is obtained by faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone.** That life sets us apart as the bride of Christ and the transformation of our lives begins by the work of the Spirit and the Word in our hearts and minds. He is preparing us for that glorious day when we will be ready to be with Him forever!

To Him who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to Him be the glory forever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen!

Questions:

- 1 In what way does the law put us under a curse?
- 2 Why does the law bring condemnation?
- 3 What is Paul's frequently repeated proof text?
- 4 Has the law ever made anyone righteous?
- 5 What does it mean to have LIFE?
- 6 To what extent are we living by faith in the Son of God?
- 7 If by effort we finally lived the law, why wouldn't that save us?
- 8 How did Christ redeem us?
- 9 Why did Christ redeem us?
- 10 What is being done in our lives today to prepare us for our future?

ⁱ **Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV)**

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

ⁱⁱ **Deuteronomy 27:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ “‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

ⁱⁱⁱ **Exodus 20:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 14:12 (ESV)**

¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

^v **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

^{vi} **Acts 21:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

^{vii} **Leviticus 18:5 (ESV)**

⁵ You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

^{viii} Wilson, Todd, Preaching the Word - Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living.

^{ix} **Isaiah 33:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil,

^x **Micah 6:8 (ESV)**

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

^{xi} *Lightfoot*

^{xii} **Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV)**

⁴ “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

^{xiii} **Romans 1:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

^{xiv} **Hebrews 10:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”

^{xv} **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

^{xvi} **Psalms 32:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

^{xvii} **Psalms 106:30-31 (ESV)**

³⁰ Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed.³¹ And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.

^{xviii} **Psalms 34:2 (ESV)**

² My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

^{xix} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xx} **John 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

^{xxi} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxii} **Ecclesiastes 9:3 (ESV)**

³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

xxiii Deuteronomy 6:25 (ESV)

²⁵ And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'

xxiv Romans 10:5 (ESV)

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

xxv Hebrews 10:1-2 (ESV)

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?

xxvi Exodus 31:13 (ESV)

¹³ "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.

xxvii John 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

xxviii Numbers 21:9 (ESV)

⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

xxix Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (ESV)

²² "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,
²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

xxx Genesis 12:3 (ESV)

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

xxxi Matthew 10:22 (ESV)

²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

xxxii Hebrews 10:36 (ESV)

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

xxxiii Genesis 2:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

xxxiv John 15:3 (ESV)

³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

xxxv John 16:8 (ESV)

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

xxxvi Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

xxxvii Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

xxxviii Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

xxxix 1 John 3:1-3 (ESV)

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

xl Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.