

## THE CURSE OF THE LAW

### Galatians 3:10-18

The context for our passage today is Paul writing to a group of churches in Galatia, in what is now known as modern day Turkey, that were dealing with false teaching from men known as Judaizers. Judaizers had snuck into the church with the intention of changing its doctrines on salvation and sanctification, bringing the believers in the church into bondage by preaching Law. They tried to mix works of the Law with the grace through faith message, teaching that if you really wanted to be saved and really wanted to grow, you needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses and observe certain aspects of the Law. And so far, to shut down the false teaching, since the beginning of chapter 3, Paul has made two arguments mainly on the issue of justification (how one is declared righteous by God; saved). **The first argument**, in verses 1-5, proved that the Galatians were justified before the Judaizers even came around preaching Law to them. It was an argument based on personal experience. They had received the Spirit of God and knew the work of the Spirit of God in their lives simply by hearing the message of the gospel and responding to it in faith. If someone has the Spirit of God, they have been justified and they belong to God. They have been baptized and sealed by the Spirit of God for eternal salvation by simple faith in Christ and they grew spiritually by faith in Christ by the Spirit. **The second argument** was also from experience, but this time not their own. It was a Scriptural example of someone else who had been justified by faith and not by Law. It was the example of Abraham. Abraham, the first Jew, was declared righteous by God simply for believing God's Word to Him, believing that what God said, He was able to carry out, concerning his offspring being as numerous as the stars of heaven. Abraham was justified *before he was circumcised* and *before the Law was even given to his descendants*.

Now for his **third argument** he begins to argue his case for justification by faith by describing the nature or the character of Law itself. **One of the best ways to understand grace is to study the Law – to study the Law itself** – and that's exactly what Paul does in Romans and Galatians. If you remember from last week, we talked a lot about faith and how it results in righteousness and blessing. This week, we really begin to feel the fullness of that emphasis because it's now contrasted with the exact opposite. If you want to live under Law, it will result in slavish work and cursing. It can be a cruel taskmaster. **We're going from faith and righteousness and blessing to Law and works and cursing**. He demonstrates from Scripture...

#### I. **THE LAW PUTS PEOPLE UNDER A CURSE. (VV. 10-12)**

"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse." Paul is referring back to Deuteronomy 27:26 where Moses reaffirmed the Law to the Israelites and their need to live according to it right before they entered the Promised Land. He repeated several commands of the Lord from the Law and said cursed is the one who does not do it and the people replied with an amen. For example, he said, "'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.' And all the people said, 'Amen.'" And Moses combines all of the commands together with the last one, saying, "'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" This is part of the reason why it brings a curse. Because...

#### A. **If you live under Law, you must keep all of it. (v. 10)**

"Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them." It curses men because it's impossible to keep without failing at one point or another. Living under Law was like walking on eggshells. If you misstep to the right or left, it could all over for you. Or you had to go offer your sacrifice and that costs you. **It demanded perfect obedience**. It reminds me of those black storms with low-hanging

walls clouds that come rolling into town in the spring time. There's an eerie anticipation that comes over you because of their power to strike things down and wipe things out. They bring wind and hail and lightning and destroy things. The Law's like that in the sense. It even came with a storm like that on Mt. Sinai. It looms over you. You know it's there. You sense it continually and if you get out of line, you get struck down by its penalty.

Keeping the Law perfectly is impossible and especially for us, because there's no way we can live under it as a whole, with its ceremonial and civil stipulations. We don't have a temple or national government like Israel. This is one of the most important things to remember when it comes to the Law. Do not forget this point. Every person who lives under Law or thinks its okay to live under the Law is missing this key point. **IF YOU WANT TO LIVE UNDER THE LAW YOU MUST LIVE UNDER ALL OF IT AS A COMPLETE UNIT. You cannot pick and choose which parts of the law are convenient for you to live under. You must keep it all.** A lot of people approach the Law like they approach their cherry tree. When they go to pick the cherry tree, they throw the undesirable cherries away and only keep the good ones that are more appealing. When it comes to the Law, people like to pick and choose which parts of it they feel like they can keep and try to be justified by keeping them. And in so doing, they are not taking the Law as complete unit. James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one point, he has become guilty of breaking all of it. (NIV)" You have to keep it all and you cannot fail at one point.

You cannot separate the moral aspects of the Law from the civil or ceremonial. It has church and state elements to it that cannot be separated. The ceremonial, temple aspect comes with the civil, national government aspects. You can't add to the Law or take away from it according to Deut. 12:32. That includes its divine penalties. It comes with commands, obligation to meet those commands, and penalties against anyone who fails to do so.<sup>1</sup> We don't stone people to death for their sins. We don't live under the rule of eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, life for a life. **Yet those who want to live under Law for justification strip it of its divine penalties and by so doing, violate the Law that is not to be taken away from. The Law without its penalties is not really Law, it's just weak and worthless legalism (Gal. 4:9).** Yet, those who are legalists and are preaching parts of the Law for their flock to live under will call those who preach biblical grace apart from Law, antinomians (Anti-Law). It's a false charge though for like Alva McClain said: "For in the gospel of salvation by grace alone in Christ we are honoring the law and establishing the law. By His death our Lord Jesus satisfied in full all the law's holy and just demands. The real antinomians are the legalists, for they either take only one element of the law, or they strip it of its penalties or they soften and relax its demands; to this extent they are against the law."<sup>2</sup> The real antinomians are those who want to cherry pick the Law. Paul said, "Do we nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. (Rom. 3:31)" How are we establishing it? Because we look at it and declare it good, holy and just and acknowledge that we obviously aren't, and have no reason to put confidence in the flesh, so we put it in Christ. We put all of our confidence in Christ and not in our doing.

A lot of people, though, if you ask them if they're going to heaven will defer to their keeping of the 10 commandments. They don't think they're bad people. They've never murdered anyone or worshipped an idol. They think they're pretty good. But you think about coveting. There's one of the ten commandments that tends to be overlooked. The

Law said thou shall not covet. Have you ever coveted? Your neighbor's house or wife or anything that belongs to them? Guilty. The Law said you shall not bear false witness? Ever done that? Guilty. Have you ever stolen something? Guilty. Have you ever worked on Saturday, the Sabbath day? Guilty. That one reminds me of a friend of mine. He had taken his kids with him on Sunday afternoon one time to go do some physical labor which involved moving dirt. And the one of his kids complained about it saying, "Don't you know you're not supposed to work on the Lord's day?" to which he replied, "If you want to live under Law, I'll have to stone you for talking back to me and not being obedient." That ended that. But think about it. Under the Law, you have to stone your kids to death for being disobedient and rebellious (Dt. 21:18-21). Have you ever worn clothes made up of more than one type of fabric? Mixed fabric? Guilty. Have you ever rounded off the edges of your beard? Trimmed it up? Guilty. Have you ever kept the festivals or feasts which are commanded? When's the last time you observed the Feast of Booths or Unleavened Bread or First Fruits? Slaughtered a sacrifice for your sins on the Day of Atonement? Where's your temple and your Jewish priest in Jerusalem to do that? The Law is so much more to it than just 10 commandments. It's not for you and I to live under. It was for a different national people, living in a different time. The primary application is to national Israel with a literal land and literal nation to govern. Besides that, Paul says...

**B. Works of the Law alone cannot justify anyone. (v. 11)**

Paul says no one is justified by the works of the Law alone. He says it's evident. It's clear. It's been made plain. Even if you were to keep the Law to a T like Paul, offering sacrifices every time you sinned, if they weren't offered in faith, they weren't accepted. The Bible talks a lot about how **faith without works is dead**. Faith that's just empty profession. Faith that calls Christ the Way but doesn't walk with Him. That's lawlessness, doing away with morality and ethics altogether, which tramples the Son of God underfoot and insults God's Spirit of grace by living in willful sin (Heb. 10:26-31). When we say we don't live under Law, it doesn't mean that we disregard the Law altogether as if it no longer serves a purpose to world that needs to understand its sin. But we're dealing with the opposite of lawlessness, which is legalism. **Works without faith is also dead**. Works without having fully trusted Christ is dead. No one's ever been justified for their works alone. God's never accepted ritualistic offerings. It was the faith of the person that justified them. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 which says the righteous man shall live by faith. He's giving further evidence that **this matter of being justified by faith is not new**. It is an Old Testament concept. Paul said in Romans 9:31 that, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works... For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." Instead of approaching God humbly and recognizing that they didn't measure up, they tried establishing their own righteousness through the Law. They thought heaven was for sale<sup>3</sup> and they were on their way to earning it but it could never be earned by being good enough.

**C. Works of the Law are contrary to faith. (vv. 11-12)**

They're opposites. They're are in contrast. He demonstrates this by contrasting two verses: Hab. 2:4 with Lev. 18:5. This was a Jewish principle of interpretation called *gezera shawa* (*equal category – parallelism*), whereby the meaning of one verse is drawn out by means of interpreting it in light of another verse containing the same key words.<sup>4</sup> Both verses

contain the idea of someone living according to a principle. Habakkuk says, the one who is righteous will live on the basis of faith. Leviticus says the one who practice works will live through them. You either live by faith or you live by Law. You have to choose a path. They're like oil and water that don't mix. You can't have both. You either have one or the other. You either live under Law *and the whole of it* or you live by faith in Christ, accepting that He fulfilled it. If a Judaizer had a rowboat and was going to row to heaven, one oar would have faith written on it and the other, works. But we row from faith to faith. Both our oars have faith written on them. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For IN IT the righteousness of God is revealed [not from faith to works, but] from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" Faith is how we get right and faith is how we live right. In John 6:29 Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." The only "work" that is acceptable for salvation is faith in Christ. Because...

## II. CHRIST REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW. (VV. 13-14)

How did He do that? There are two ways mentioned. One way is that...

### A. Christ became a curse for us. (v. 13)

Paul points back to Deuteronomy 21:23 which said everyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed. Notice how many times Paul quotes the Old Testament here. He keeps proving his point from the Scriptures. This verse in particular prophetically preached that Jesus would eventually become that curse, being hung on a tree. That word for tree there can refer to anything made up of the material of wood like a pole, stocks, gallows, a cross, or a stake.<sup>5</sup> He became a curse for us. He took our place and took the curse we deserved. It says He redeemed us from the curse of the Law. He has delivered us and set us free. To **redeem something is to purchase something, as though out of a market place**. Kind of like when you buy a candy bar in a gas station. You pick it up, you pay for it, and then you carry out of the store. You have secured your right to eat that candy bar because you paid the price for it. That's the idea here. Like as though we were slaves on the slave market of Law, He has purchased us out of the slave market place, so we don't have to serve the Law anymore but are free and secured in grace. We've been picked up and taken out of Law by His death.

Look at Colossians 2:11-16: "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, **having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross**. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Paul says do away with legalism because when Christ went to the cross, He took the Law with Him and nailed it to it. He has taken the decrees against us out of the way. He has liberated us from the Law's demands and it's no longer the way for God's people to approach Him. It is by faith in Christ. Paul is saying God has provided a new way to approach Him apart from Law that

leads to partaking of the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham. Which leads us to the next verse which says...

**B. Christ secured the Promise blessings for us. (v. 14)**

Jesus became the curse for us and fulfilled the Law for two purposes – really, one purpose inside of another purpose – it's a dual purpose clause in verse 14. **In order that, #1**, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles and **so that, #2**, we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. When God made the covenant with Abraham (the Abrahamic Covenant) in Genesis 12:1-3 that we looked at last week involved land, seed and blessing, God also had the Gentile nations in mind to inherit the blessings in Christ. The blessing aspect is highly spiritual according to Jeremiah 31, **involving regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit is permanently given to everyone who has come to a saving faith in Christ. Paul links the Gentiles' reception of the Spirit of God through faith in Christ with the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Promise. It's like God keeps revealing more and more about the covenant as time goes along. It becomes more and more detailed and we understand it more and more. All nations, not just Jews, have been blessed in Abraham. Contrary to the Judaizers' teaching, they didn't need to be circumcised or observe the Law to link up with Abraham, they were already linked with Abraham by the Spirit of God and have partaken of the blessing promised to him.

And it's the Holy Spirit that transforms our hearts in a way that the Law simply never could. The Law was powerless to transform the heart and give victory over sin and the flesh like we experience now. The Law made a lot of demands, but it didn't provide the power to keep it and the guidance that the Spirit does. The Old Testament saints didn't receive this blessed spiritual life that we have today with the Spirit unconditionally indwelling us, cheering us and guiding us. Through the Spirit He writes the Law on our hearts in a new and intimate way.

**III. MAJOR APPLICATIONS TO REMEMBER:**

**A. Use the Law properly.**

As far as applying our passage, I think we need to make sure again that we are using the Law properly. When you read the Law, any of it from Exodus to Leviticus, or Numbers or Deuteronomy, don't go making a list of different commands out of it you feel like you need to keep in order to be justified by God, unless you plan on writing out the whole Law with every single command. The primary application goes to Israel. Sure we can learn from it and understand God's heart but remember, **Take it as a whole. If you're going to make any sort of list by reading through the Law – make it a list of all the commands you've broken**. That way you understand that there is no way you are ever going to live up to its standards or put confidence in the flesh. You can't keep it. Don't cherry pick it for your justification. I mentioned this a while back but treat it like you would treat a **handheld mirror**: Pick it up look at it, see God's character in it and your condition (examine yourself by it), come to the conclusion that you're a sinner who doesn't meet God's standards, and then put it down and turn to Christ. Or treat it like an **x-ray machine**: Go to the x-ray machine and let it reveal your faults, but don't expect it to fix you any more than an x-ray machine can fix you. It can't and it won't. Even if it could, it's not the way the Doctor has prescribed for us to be fixed this day in age. The Doctor has issued us a prescription of grace through faith in Christ. The main purpose of the Law is to show us our sin and our need for a Savior. This doesn't mean we're supporting lawlessness. In that sense, Paul said the Law was good as long as we use it lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8). Paul said it's for the lawless, rebellious, ungodly,

and sinners. It can have a restraining effect on sin in that sense but it won't transform the heart and give power over sin and the flesh like the Spirit does by being born again through faith in Christ.

### **B. Maintain a grace-oriented church culture.**

The culture of the church is to remain a gospel of grace culture – not a culture of Law. And we have to guard ourselves from coming up with a new form of laws and regulations that God hasn't prescribed. That's evident based on the history of this church isn't it? Some churches or church leadership – with the intention of protecting the flock from the world – have been known for coming up with certain man-made rules and fallen prey to legalism in doing so. Law, in a sense, can be revived in the Church through the legalism of rules beyond Scripture. One of books we're reading as a church board said legalism usually “rears its ugly head” through certain types of **dress**, certain types of **music**, and having the “right” version or **translation** of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Some other more unnecessarily laws are: We can't watch tv or movies, can't play cards, can't dance, can't work on Sunday, can't play on Sunday, can't have nice things, can't own more than one thing – like a house or car. All made up laws. Legalism thrives in externals.

Legalism measures people by their outward performance and is constantly making comparisons. It thrives in negativity and self-pride. And it's funny because it tends to thrive in the grayer areas of life. In the grace age, we don't have to tell everyone everything they're doing wrong, especially in gray matters where we have no authority. We can trust the Spirit of God to do His thing. Some people it seems like want to do the Spirit's job a little too much. We have to stand together for a grace-cultured church.

### **C. Only faith in Christ justifies.**

That's the constantly reoccurring application throughout Galatians. Paul says today you have one path that is by faith in Christ and leads to eternal life, righteousness and blessing. The other is by Law and leads to works and death and cursing and condemnation for eternity. Which path do you want to be on? Christ is the only one who could fully satisfy the Law because He's the only one who kept it perfectly from birth to death. He was the perfect sacrifice. Put your faith in Him as the one who paid for your sins by His death on the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1967), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> David Thompson, *Galatians 3:10-18 sermon notes*, accessed 18 March 2019, [texascornersbiblechurch.org](http://texascornersbiblechurch.org).

<sup>4</sup> David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 292.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 293.

<sup>6</sup> Glenn C. Daman, *Developing Leaders for the Small Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 103.