

## Live By Faith Galatians 3:10-14

We continue to talk about our identity in Christ and how grounding ourselves in Jesus above all else changes us. Amid a stormy and volatile culture, a world broken by sin and bent on destruction, where foundational identifiers of who we are—our country, community, rights and freedoms, gender roles, race and even the church--are constantly evolving. Grounding ourselves in Jesus gives us a security and a certainty and a peace that cannot be matched. Founding and grounding our identity in Christ gives us a bedrock, core persona that cannot be overcome—even in the storm.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to describe his life like this:

**I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.**

### Galatians 2:20

If we have been crucified with Christ and Christ lives in us what does our life look like? That is our question today, if we have been crucified with Christ and it is Jesus who is alive in us, “How do we live?”

How do I live...by faith?

Twenty years ago yesterday I was woken up by a pre-dawn phone call. A family from the church I served called to plead with me to come over immediately. They had been watching the morning news, drinking their coffee, preparing to start their day as usual when the station went to a reporter live on the scene of a one car wreck along a busy stretch of highway outside of town. They recognized the twisted and mangled car belonging to their 19-year-old son. The reporter concluded the report saying, “It appears alcohol was involved and that there are no survivors.”

I arrived at their front door at the same time as the Tennessee State Highway Patrol and I was there when the officer confirmed their fears. Over the next few days, we planned their son’s funeral and his story was all too common. He had been a part of the church as a child. He was baptized and confessed Jesus as His Lord and Savior but drifted from the church and showed very little in his life that demonstrated any kind of belief in Jesus at all. For that entire week the family struggled to define his life and the wrestled with what, if anything, was next for their son.

At the funeral I preached that this young man who died way too soon, apparently accidentally by his own hand and showed almost nothing of a relationship with Jesus, was now with Jesus. I based my conclusion on one event—his confession of faith and his baptism at the age of 13.

And I’ll stand by that today. The better I know Jesus, the more shocking His grace becomes. But it doesn’t mean the young man’s life, even at a mere 19 years old, didn’t fall tragically short of what Jesus made available for him.

We are talking today about living by faith. And this might be the most important sermon in this entire series because we misunderstand the goal and the aim of the Christian life. Too many Christians approach our life like we are taking a test in school. When I was in

college we had a phrase, “C=BA” meaning a passing grade gives your bachelor’s degree. Or you may have heard “Do you know what you call a med school graduate with a “C” average? You call them ‘Doctor.’”

And we sometimes apply that same logic to our faith. As long we do whatever is required to get into heaven, meet the bare minimum standard, pass the test, and avoid going to hell, its all good. As long as we can punch our ticket to get on the bus, we’re happy. And we should be...to a point.

But the aim of the Christian life is not to just pass the test and have just enough faith to get into heaven when we die. That’s actually a tragedy because the goal of life to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and hearts will ache and yearn and we will be plagued with a terribly desperate spiritual thirst until we align our heart in that way. And the Church’s witness is shredded because Christians don’t live any differently than anyone else and in many cases worse because we know “No matter what I do, I’m going to heaven.”

The theologian Dallas Willard said,

**The sensed irrelevance of what God is doing in our lives is the foundational flaw in the existence of multitudes of professing Christians today. It is left unexplained how it is possible that one can rely on Christ for the next life without doing so for this one.**

Its important in so many ways that we choose to live for Jesus in this life. And we might think this all happens through hard work, rigorous self-discipline and focus and following the law to perfection.

Wrong.

It’s by faith. We live by faith.

**Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”**

#### **Galatians 3:11**

We talked a little bit last week about what faith is.

The Bible defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.” In other words, **faith is trusting God to do what He promises He will do before He does it.** Faith is acting upon a trust in God’s Word.

Faith is not merely mental assent or intellectual agreement resulting in lip service and no more. Faith is not nodding our head while our hands and feet go in a different direction.

Faith is having sufficient trust in the Word of God, God’s character, God’s intent to live according to those promises. Faith is submission to God, trusting that His will for me is grounded in the kind of love that would lead God to die on the cross in my stead.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to say that the opposite of faith is attempting to make ourselves right with God or justify our existence or establish ourselves is by works, by following the law to make ourselves perfect, do greater things, be happy, or justify our existence.

**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**

Now this has been a hard lesson for me to learn because works righteousness is deeply wired into me as I suspect it is for many of you. And my immediate reaction to any problem, any shortcoming, any issue is simply to work harder.

Am I the only one?

If we trust the promise of Scripture, then we know that if we rely on works to set the world right then we curse ourselves rather than bless ourselves. And by the way, the Bible only describes one kind of curse. The curse is death. When we rely upon works rather than living by faith, we court death in the places where God intends for there to be life. And we curse ourselves and our life. And it is no unnecessary because Jesus has already taken the curse of sin upon Himself.

**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**

When we try to make our life right, make ourselves righteous, justify our existence and define ourselves by what we do rather than what Jesus has done for us, we are actually saying, “I trust myself more than I trust the God who created everything. I can do better than God’s only Son when He lived a life perfect obedience and died on the cross for the sins of the world.” We are saying I can bless myself more than the God of the universe can bless me.”

And when we do, we end up cursing ourselves.

Deuteronomy 28 is long description of what a curse looks like in our lives and how it plays itself out. And it worth reading sometime because of its application to our lives but it ends with these words:

**Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.**

**Deuteronomy 28:67-68**

To put in another way, when we curse ourselves by relying on works rather than faith to make this life go the way we hope it will go, we are constantly filled with doubt and dread. We fear what might happen. We are never satisfied and always hoping for things to be different. Nothing is ever enough. Nothing satisfies us. Life is never all we believe it can be. And it seldom is all we believe it should be.

And we are tired, so very, very tired because we are constantly chasing something just beyond our grasp.

If any of you have read George Orwell’s classic book *Animal Farm* then you know about Boxer the huge draft horse who works on the farm under the leadership of the pigs who are

supposed to represent the communist government ruling from the people and sucking them dry while they live in ease and luxury. Boxer is amazingly strong but not very bright. He meets any problem, any challenge with the mantra, “I will work harder.” But no matter how hard Boxer works, the work is never done. The farm is never successful, there is always more to do and some crisis to resolve and Boxer never gets the rest and peace he longs for. Eventually, Boxer works so hard that he becomes injured and useless and infirm. With his strength spent, the pigs sell him to the slaughterhouse.

*Animal Farm*, you may know, is a metaphor for living under the tyranny of communism and Boxer is supposed to represent the workers who are promised rest and prosperity by their leaders but end up being worked to death.

If we choose to live by relying on works to justify ourselves, we willingly place ourselves under the tyranny of the law. There is literally no limit, no end to what works will demand that we do to justify ourselves, to make ourselves right and righteous. There will always be a crisis and the work will never be done and we will inevitably fall back upon the mantra of “I will work harder.” And we will court death where God intends for us to know and experience life.

And this is not what Jesus intends for us because this is His promise about living by faith:

**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

So, if the righteous live by faith rather than the law, then how do we live and what is the law for? Do we just throw it away and make our own rules? Do we just do whatever is right in our eyes, make our own rules, sin now and ask forgiveness later because we know that God has promised to forgive us no matter what and our ticket to heaven is already punched?

In a word, “No.” Like that young man who heartbreakingly died 20 years ago, our life falls tragically short of Jesus’ intent and the blessings and new life we have available, when we live in whatever way we please, when we are a law unto ourselves.

Living by faith does not release us from keeping the law—although we are not made righteous by our ability to keep the law. Following the law becomes an act of faith. **Galatians 3:11-12:**

**Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”**

So, even though we are not made righteous by following the law, the law still has a purpose in how we live by faith. John Calvin put it very simply:

**It is impossible to obtain righteousness by works but we are not concerned with whether believers should keep the law to the best of their ability—we all agree with that!**

You can almost hear Calvin saying, “Well, duh.”

The law doesn’t have to be a tyrant, it can instead be an ally to our faith. Following the law doesn’t have to curse us, if we walk first by faith, it can bless us.

The law helps us live by faith in three ways.

**First, the law helps create a good society.**

This is known as the civic use of the law, meaning the law is an aid to people who are making society’s laws to reflect the will of God and His eternal word. The more the laws of society reflect God’s eternal law, what some call natural law, the better that society will be.

We have a very real example of this happening before our eyes. As we watch the tragedy over the last few weeks of the Taliban once again taking control of Afghanistan what we are really mourning is a government coming to power whose laws do not reflect God’s law. The laws they are putting in place justify execution on demand for minor offenses, the subjugation of women and others who they deem sub-human and the absolute annihilation of basic human freedoms. The Civil Rights Movement, led by disciples of Jesus Christ, was a call for America to change our laws that discriminated against African-Americans in particular, to better reflect God’s law that says we are all made in His image and of one race. We outlaw theft, murder, fraud, libel and slander, assault and host of other crimes largely based on the Ten Commandments. And there is a reason for that. Man-made law, civic law that reflects God’s law makes for a good society.

**Second, the law helps create a good understanding of our sinfulness.**

It’s easy to gain a false sense of our own proficiency and expertise when we don’t have the right comparisons. I have a friend who was a great ball player, back in high school. He walked on at a college and immediately saw that against college pitchers he could not get the bat around fast enough to hit a fair ball. I remember believing I was pretty smart until in my first week in seminary I sat next to a guy who had already two Ph.Ds—one from Harvard and one from Notre Dame.

It’s easy, when we don’t have the right comparison, to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. When we look at other people and how they live, we might think we are not that bad, maybe even that we are not sinful at all. We can always find someone else to look at and say, “Well, I’m not as bad as that guy!”

That’s why we need the law. That’s why we just can’t throw the law away because we are made righteous by faith. John Calvin said the law is like a mirror that we hold up to ourselves to see what we look like. Have you ever looked in the bathroom mirror and gained a new understanding of what you really look like?

Absolutely. And sometimes seeing who we really are—either the condition of our body or the condition of our soul—can throw us into despair. So, we avoid it. We avoid the mirror. We avoid the honest, forthright conversation, we leave the bill in the envelope, we avoid the relationship, we don’t open the e-mail and we even avoid a deeper understanding of God’s law.

But in the case of the law, especially, its unnecessary. God never shows us our sin to crush us or cause us to despair or become hopeless about the state of our soul. God never even shows us our sin to accuse us. That’s what Satan does. He’s the Accuser. Our Heavenly Father, who loves us with a perfect love, shows us our sin to convict and make us fall upon His

grace and love. God loves us perfectly. And living by faith means trusting His promises and His Word enough to submit to His Lordship of our life. Trusting in God's undying, unwavering love for us and a trust in His promise to grow us into the fullness of the image of His only Son Jesus allows us to even pray boldly for God to show us our sin. Israel's King David had such great faith in the Lord and trust in His undying love that He asked God to look deep within him and reveal his sin.

**Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!**

**Psalm 139:24**

When we know the law and we understand God's character, we can know the depths of our soul better than anyone and that leads us to the third way the law helps live by faith.

### **The law helps create good works.**

We were made for good works. We were made to lives that reflect God's goodness. In fact the Word teaches we were chosen and set apart before the foundation of the universe for that very thing. We're not saved by the works. We are saved by grace through faith. But we are saved to do those works. And the law helps create good works because it shows us how to live. We know, because of the law, not to lie or steal or covet, to be faithful to our spouse, and to love our neighbor. There is a reason why Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, which talks about God's law and how to live.

But here is the question. How do we go from breaking God's law to keeping God's law? How do we change our hearts from rebelling against God to reveling in His character? How do we go from sinner to saint?

Self-determination? Self-discipline? Unyielding strength and resolve?

Or is it faith? Is it trust in Jesus to do something in me and through me greater than I could do myself?

**Galatians 3:14** tells us:

**In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**

The work of the Holy Spirit, and God's blessing, comes to us by faith—through submitting ourselves to Jesus' Lordship, trusting God to do what He says He will do before He does and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to create that faith in us, bend our hearts and lead us to a place of following God's law, do good works and live as a follower of Jesus.

That's not our work. It's Jesus' work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this tells us how to live.

To live by faith means to seek first King Jesus and His Kingdom, to foster our friendship with our Lord and Savior and rely upon His strength as our first impulse rather than our last resort. When we open up the windows of our soul to the work of the Holy Spirit, we are

carried along in new life. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

We don't keep His commandments out of our love. We keep His commandments because we rely on and return His love. Obedience is the fruit of love. Not the other way around.

When Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” it was a promise not command.