

## Saving Faith, Catastrophic Crisis, Deadly Curse

Galatians 3:6–14

**Intro:** What if there were two ways to be made right with God. Two ways, you say? I thought there was one way. Well, consider this statement from the Mosaic Law:

**Leviticus 18:5 — You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.** You shall keep my statutes and rules, and if you do, you will live. The “live,” there, refers to eternal life. In other words, if a person keeps all of God’s law — all of it, perfectly — he will not just have day-to-day breath in his lungs, he will have eternal life. He will escape death, which is what sin produces. So that seems to suggest that keeping the Law gives life. But there is a massive, looming “if” in the second clause that does a lot more than just establishing a condition: “if a person does them.” “If a person does them” actually points us to impossibility of any child of Adam ever keeping the perfect Law in way, shape, or form. Indeed, it hints at the purpose of the Law: to utterly expose, beyond shadow of a doubt, that we are law breakers by nature, and therefore under the curse of death that comes from being a law breaker.

Consider a story and a question I heard John Gerstner ask years ago.

Say I leave my house to go to the Jordans, where my group is meeting this evening. As I back out of my driveway, the speed limit on my residential street is 25 mph. I joyfully accelerate to 60. As I turn down Pawnee and then Maize headed to Kellogg, the speed limit is 40. I joyfully drive 60. When I get to Kellogg, the speed limit is 60. I joyfully drive 60. When I get down south, perhaps near the base, the speed limit is 50. I joyfully drive 60. I enter Derby, and the speed limit is 40. I joyfully drive 60. Question: At what time did I joyfully and perfectly obey the law? Answer: Never. But I thought you obeyed on Kellogg when the speed limit was 60. No, my driving 60 had nothing to do with the posted law. I just like to drive 60, so that’s what I do. If at some point that happened to match what the law, it in no way indicated I obeyed the law with any delight in, any devotion to, any desire for being righteous. I just like going 60. What does my going 60 in a 60 mph zone do for me when I get pulled over in Derby in a 40 mph zone? Nothing. I’m lawless, and fall under the just condemnation of the Law. “Mr. Atkins, here’s an invitation to the party. See you in 30 days.” And that’s just man’s law.

The standard for righteousness as measured by God’s holiness is moral perfection in every action, thought, word, want, delight, devotion, desire, affection, interpretation, and understanding of the world — the standard for righteousness is perfection in all of that. Jesus summed it up in the Sermon on the

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Mount in **Matthew 5:48** — “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That was after he made plain how incapable we are of keeping the Law of God, not only on an external basis, but down at the heart level. In the short paragraphs just prior he says that if you’ve been angry you’ve murdered. If you’ve ever once had a lustful thought flash your mind, you are an adulterer.

Then what must I do to be saved? Let’s ask Abraham, the father of those who believe and are justified. Abraham prophetically saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. (John 8:56) Abraham would say, “There is only one way you will ever be saved, or justified before God. That will be through faith — faith in the perfect, righteous work of a perfect righteous substitute. This is the fullness of salvation by grace through faith that Paul is developing in Galatians 3.

### PRAY

**Galatians 3:1–14** — O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.<sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? <sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—<sup>6</sup> just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

<sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” <sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” <sup>13</sup> 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”— <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. [The word of God]

Don’t fall for it. Wake up, Galatians. Don’t fall for the Judaizer’s mind trick that,

- though you began by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit who produced faith and repentance, *and*
- though the Spirit now living in you, uniting you to Christ, is evidence of redemption...

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*now* you need to get your legs under you and finish things off by adding some select parts of the Mosaic Law to beef up the work of Christ crucified. Don't fall for it! You heard the Gospel, and on hearing it, the Spirit made it alive, convicting you of sin, and gave faith. Don't fall for a false promise.

Today Paul continues to lay the foundation of theology — the foundation of right thinking about God — that makes it plain that, from the foundation of the earth God's plan to justify ungodly sinners is through faith — faith in the righteous Son of God. **God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

The Judaizers were going back to Moses, if you will, to support their false teaching that adding works of the Mosaic law added righteousness. So the Apostle reaches back *before* Moses to Abraham to show that God was in the redeeming and justifying business long before the Law was given. And the way he was doing it then is the same way he is doing it now: through faith.

#### **Saving Faith** — vvs. 6–9

**v. 6** [beginning in 5 for context] — Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— <sup>6</sup>**just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?**

**Romans 4:3 — For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”**

**James 2:23 — <sup>23</sup>and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.**

These New Testament passages are all quoting **Genesis 15:6**, where God made a covenant with Abraham that God would raise up a people of faith that would be innumerable.

**Genesis 15:5–6 — <sup>5</sup>And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>6</sup>And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**

Abraham was not a perfect man. Our children have been studying Abraham and have seen his sinfulness up close. Abraham wasn't even a Jew. There weren't any Jews. Abraham became the proto-Jew, if you will, but at the time there were only Gentiles. So if no Jews, no Mosaic Law given to the Jews. The 2 thundering words from that verse quoted several times in the New Testament are

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*believe* and *righteousness*. They are inextricably linked in God's redemptive plan that was put in place prior to the Law.

Abraham became the father of those who believe God and are saved. Note that the object of our faith is critical. It is not that faith saves, but God who saves. It will do no good to have tons of faith in anything you can do, or anyone else can do. We live in a day when people can make serious statements along the lines of, "Well, I do have faith. I don't believe in that outdated God of the outdated bible — but I am spiritual and I believe in spiritual things. I have a lot of faith, and things will work out." I am not sure what that means, but a faith placed in spiritual things, in things other than what God has ordained, or a faith in good deeds, or good intentions, or "social justice" — will not save, because it cannot provide righteousness, and righteousness is what is required. As God allowed Abraham to joyfully look ahead in faith and see the atoning work of Christ, we joyfully look back at the finished work of Christ and put our faith in the same One Abraham did. The object of our faith is critical, not just faith in something. The Judaizers were putting their faith in keeping parts of the ceremonial law. They may have had a lot of faith, but it was not in what would save.

Lest we think that Abraham's faith worked up some merit with God, notice the word *credited*. It is an accounting term that is not based on something earned, but a bookkeeping entry.

I'm pleased to say I earned signature status on my Chick-fil-a app this week. That means I earned about 10,000 reward points by purchasing tasty chicken chunks, and those reward points can be used to purchase more tasty chicken chunks. But you know what else I can do? I can send friends points from my vast supply and Chick-fil-a will perform some bookkeeping magic and they will be credited with my points to get chicken! They didn't earned those points. They didn't work for them. But out of my beneficence I can credit them with nuggets or waffle fries.

Abraham believed God and God credited him with righteousness. Not earned. Credited. Salvation, by definition, is an external work accomplished by God, not something I produce or earn. I am in bondage. I am dead. There is a rescue operation that God undertakes to save. We must believe this.

So Paul establishes that being justified by faith was God's Plan A, not half-baked scheme that later needed improvement. Now he turns to the fatal inconsistency of the Judaizer's hope that relying on certain aspects of the Law will give them a turbo boost of righteousness.

## Catastrophic Crisis — vvs. 10–12

**vvs. 10** — <sup>10</sup> **For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.** Well that escalated quickly. Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> argument is that the Law doesn't help you become righteous, it exposes unrighteousness, and thereby places you under a curse. He quotes 4 passages from the Old Testament, including passages from the Law to prove that the Law cannot save. He uses those passages to create a crisis for those who are returning to the law.

### Anyone under the law is under a curse. What does that mean?

Some form of the word curse is used about 160 times in the Old Testament, and shows up in more than half the books of the Old Testament. The mega-themes of blessing and cursing function like synonyms for eternal life and favor, or eternal death and condemnation.

Blessing captures the image of God's face, favor, grace, and active blessing meted out to those in communion with him.

Cursing is the opposite. God's face and favor are turned away from those who do not obey God's commands, and they are not the recipients of grace, but are actively being judged with righteous judgement because of sin. Being cursed is nothing less than being under the wrath of God. John 3:36 concisely sums up the blessing of faith in Christ, and the curse of separation from Christ:

**John 3:36** — Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; ... [Is that blessing or curse?] whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him, or clings to him. [What is that?]

The purpose of the Law is to expose sin and unrighteousness, which we will see as we move through the book. You can say you are using the Law however you want to, but God determines the function of the law, and you remain under the curse of God's wrath as long as you remain under the law.

That's a broad general statement. But he creates further crisis for those who would add ceremonial law in the next phrase of **v. 10** — **for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."**

Ok, Judaizers, you who are picking and choosing which laws to perform. You are adding dietary laws and ceremonial laws, but that won't work. Deuteronomy 27:26, which part of the Law, says that you unless you keep all of it you are cursed. You can't embrace Christ as a replacement for the sacrificial law, but keep circumcision as part of the ceremonial law to do virtue signaling. This aint Pizza Ranch,

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and the Law is not a buffet. Galatians, they have put you in crisis. You are not headed toward grace and blessing; you are headed for death and cursing, because you can't be selective.

So the crisis is evident. He paints in clear, bold, unmistakable lines: No one is justified before God by the Law, because the Law exposes and condemns. It does not cover and redeem. As he forces them to this catastrophic crisis of the curse of sin, he reminds them again: Righteousness *is* available, but not by the law. Righteousness is credited through faith in the Son of God.

How does that work? Why is that? God has done what the law, could not do, weakened by the flesh as it was. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh he condemned sin in the flesh.

### **Deadly Curse — vv. 13–14**

vv. 13a — Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us

Faith that saves is in the One who saves: Christ. Christ redeemed us — he purchased us, who were under the just curse of sin, the wrath of God, by paying the price for sin himself. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The wages of that sin — what sin has earned for sinners — is death. Simply put, Christ became the curse — he became what he was not: sin, and a curse — that I might receive what I had not: righteousness.

He paid the price for sin when hung on a tree and bore the wrath of God poured out on lawbreakers. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21 that described how criminals were to be executed, and that the means of execution — being hung on a tree — was evidence that they were under the curse. Because Christ became a curse for me, I no longer have to pay that price. And he clothed me in his perfect righteousness, which was demonstrated by his perfect keeping of the law, so that I no longer lack positive righteousness. That is what the hymn writer calls the double cure:

Be of sin the double cure;

Save from wrath, and make me pure.

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

Will you stop and behold the beauty and love and grace of the Savior? We began talking about the nature of our deepest problem. Sin and unrighteousness has stained and marred every aspect of who we are. Lust, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits

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of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these are part and parcel of what our evil hearts embrace — and all of them gain not the blessing of God, but the curse of God — his wrath. But behold, Christ has become the curse in your place, if you will look away from yourself, your self-righteousness, your self-justifying efforts, and believe Christ, trusting him to carry away the weight and burden of your sin so that you no longer bear. There is freedom now in Christ. Now just some day in the sweet by and by — but now. This moment you can be set free from the curse of sin by simply trusting that Christ has borne it in your place.

Will you not gaze deeply on both the horror and beauty of Christ who became a curse? Let it cause you to abandon all hope of saving or improving yourself. Let it stir up faith to believe and trust this perfect, spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There is no hope apart for him — only cursing and wrath. But in him is life.

**John 6:40 — For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

That eternal life that he gives, the freedom from the chains of sin and sin’s penalty, the redemption received by faith — these should shape not only our future in eternity, but every day living.

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!”

He is worthy of love, obedience, and the taking up of your cross and following him, no matter the cost. Believe.