



Galatians 3:10-14
The Just Shall Live By Faith

Summary: Only a fool would try to live a good life in their own strength when you could receive grace fully, freely, and forever from God in Christ.

How do you know if you're good with God? That's a question we have been discussing quite a bit lately. Most people want to be right with God, they want to know He is pleased with them, that He's not angry at them or disappointed in them. *But how can you know?* That's the question and it can cause a lot of anxiety if you really focus on it – which people deal with in different ways.

Some people just try to put it out of their mind, they think, ah, it'll all sort itself out. God's good and He's full of love, He's kind of like Santa Claus – and did you ever know anyone who actually got a lump coal for Christmas? Well, maybe, but it was only a joke, right? We've all known some pretty bad kids who did some pretty bad things and they still got gifts at Christmas. We're all a mix of naughty and nice, but it works out alright in the end.

Some people view God that way – they put God in the same category as Santa and take an optimistic outlook. Here's the problem with that view – I got a lot of gifts from Santa when I was a kid, but I can't think of anything he's brought me in probably thirty years. It seems like the system works alright for little kids, but it starts to break down as you mature. Maybe it's better to trade in some childish Christmas naiveté for the child in Bethlehem's nativity and the gift of grace that He provides?

Another approach to being right with God is to take the religious approach. Tell me what I have to do for God and I will do it. Tell me what I have to do in order to be a good person and I'm in. Give me the rules, tell me how to play the game and let's go.

This is the situation we see unfolding many years ago in the region of Galatia. Some people were claiming that the best way, in fact, the only way to *really* know you were pleasing God was to follow the rules found in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, what is also known as the law.

Now, those rules were given by God, through Moses. The Jewish people didn't just invent them. In 1775 there was a Continental Congress in Philadelphia and the Founding Fathers of the United States got together to draft some foundational documents for our country saying '*these are the things we believe and these are things Americans should do and should not do.*' But there was nothing like that for the Jewish people – God gave them this way of life.

He told them – these are the good things you should do, and these are the bad things you should not do. And if you do all the good things, and don't do any of the bad things, I'll bless

you. But if you do the bad things, or forget to do the good things, or if can't complete the good things, you'll be cursed.

The stakes are high, but the rules are plain. And there was a group of people telling the Christians in Galatia this was the way they needed to live – by religious rules. But the Apostle Paul was telling them no, that was insane and only a fool would try to live that way when they knew of the grace offered by Jesus. He continues to explain why this morning in one of the most theologically significant passages in the entire Bible.

He writes:

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."* 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for *"the just shall live by faith."* 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but *"the man who does them shall live by them."*

So, here's what's going on. Paul says, if you want to live by that religious system – the one that says 'do this, don't do that' – if you want to live by all these religious rules – you have to remember the penalty for failure – it's an eternal curse.

The law itself says: *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

Which seems kind of harsh at first, right? You ask, does God really curse us? Well, what do you think of when I say curse? You probably think of some sort of spell cast by a witch or a voodoo priest that brings bad luck or some sort of harm to people.

But think of it more like this – a blessing is a good thing that comes into our life from God. It makes our life *more* of what God wants it to be. A curse is anything that moves us farther *away* from God, deprives us of what He wants us to have, and makes us *less* of what He wants to be.

There are things in our lives, right now, that are a blessing to us and some things that are a curse. And maybe you should spend some time thinking through that, taking inventory – what are the things that propel you in your walk with God and what are the things that hold you back or weigh you down? And what do you need to do about all that?

Now, the greatest blessing of all is to be in the presence of God where all of our needs are met, all of our problems are solved, are our brokenness is healed, our pain is relieved, and there is nothing but peace and joy in our hearts and minds, in our quiet thoughts, in our relationship with God and in our relationship with others, forever. That would be a blessing, that would be shalom.

The greatest curse would be the opposite - the complete and total withdrawal of God from our lives. After all, He is the source of all that is good, right, beautiful, whole, holy, and pure.

If that was taken from us, what kind of misery would fill our lives? That vacuum would be a curse.

And that's why God can say – if you do what I tell you to do, if you obey My commandments, if you listen to My voice, I will bless you. I will draw near to you. When You show Me that you want more of Me in your life, I will respond. The Scriptures tell us in **James 4:8** “**Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.**” So, there is a sense in which we are, every one of us, as blessed as we want to be – because we've drawn as near to God as we want to be.

But on the other side, God can say, if you *don't* do what I say, if you *don't* listen to My voice, your life will be cursed. It will be hard, and frustrating, and painful, and you find ways to amuse, entertain, and even delight yourself and make your life better but none of it will truly satisfy you. In fact, some of it will destroy you. It will lead you farther and farther away from Me and your relationships will be plagued with envy, and jealousy and betrayal, and mistrust.

And here's something really important to understand – it's not even because God is actively cursing you, He's not chasing you down and causing bad things to happen to you, He's not throwing lightening bolts of displeasure at you – you're just walking farther and farther away from Him and His blessings. There's a reason why Jesus said the greatest thing we can do in life is love God with everything you've got and love others like yourself. He's pointing us in a good direction, He's pointing us back to source of all blessings and encouraging us to get closer and closer and be increasingly blessed.

So, God says, if you want Me, do this. If you don't want Me, do whatever you want. But one path leads to blessing, and other side leads to cursing.

And to some of us, that seems like a pretty good system right? The rules are clear – do this, don't do that, sounds good, got it!

But what if you realize you can't do it? What if you forget to do some of good things and what if, in a moment of weakness you slip and do some bad things? Then what? How do you recover? What do you do with your guilt? What do you do with your failure? Because the agreement in the law was, I'll do ALL these good things and I won't do ANY of those bad things and that's how I'll get closer to God.

Now, we've all had the experience where we bite off more than we can chew – we sign up for something with the best intentions, or we negotiate a deal with the best intentions, maybe you buy some new product or plan and you're *sure* you're going to use it but a few days or a few weeks go by, and you realize, this isn't going to work. I can't do this, or I can't keep doing this. You didn't mean to fail. You really wanted to do well. You meant well. But, it's not turning out the way it was supposed to, and you know it.

Well, when that happened with the Law, you were supposed to turn to God and say, God, I blew it. I did this wrong, or I didn't do that right. I tried to do this and I messed up or

couldn't finish. You were supposed to recognize, admit, and confess your failure or your rebellion or selfishness, and then make a sacrifice, an offering recognizing your failure.

But, as you did that, you were also supposed to remember that actually, one day, God was going to make everything right again. One day He would remake you and the people around you and the world you live in. He would fix all the wrongs you've done, give you strength for all your weaknesses, and heal all the wrongs that have been done to you. One day God would send a Savior, a Redeemer, a Messiah to restore and make all things new. He would make one final, perfect, sacrifice for everything that had gone wrong.

And this is how you were supposed to live in ancient Israel, the law told you what to do and what not to do, and what to do when you failed, and so you did it all as best you could while also waiting for the day when God would fix everything that you never could. Which is why we read: *"the just shall live by faith."*

That powerful little phrase is quoted three times in the New Testament – once here, once in Romans, and once in Hebrews – all three are books dealing with how we are saved – how we know we are good with God. It comes from the little book of Habbakuk in the Old Testament, written to people who were under the Law reminding them that no one was ever saved just by keeping the rules because no one could ever keep all the rules.

This is the same point Paul made last week when he reminded the Galatian Christians that Abraham was saved by faith. He simply trusted God and he did that hundreds of years before the Law was ever given.

Humanity's only hope has always and forever been, trusting in God, by faith. Trusting that He would make a way for us, trusting that He would restore what we have broken, trusting, by faith, that He would do things for us that we could never do for ourselves.

And so Paul reminds the Galatians, and us:

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"*), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Look, yes, under the law there was a curse for all who could not keep it. But remember, no one really could, so everyone was under the curse because every human being that has ever lived has broken one of God's commandments.

Let's think of just the Ten Commandments, this is just one part of God's law, the rules that you had to keep in order to be blessed.

Number One says You shall have no other God but God and you should serve Him only. So, is your number one priority in life to know and serve God? And, has it always been that

way? Do you ever get distracted and start to chase after other things? Do you ever let anyone or anything else become more important or loom larger in your life than God?

Number Three – don't take God's name in vain. Ever said the name of God or Jesus in a careless manner, as part of a curse or a surprise? You probably didn't mean to do it, and you probably didn't mean anything by it. But you did it. People blaspheme the name of God and of Jesus in all kinds of ways that they would never use any other name.

Number Five – honor your father and mother – ever disobeyed mom and dad? Ever lied to them? Kept any secrets from them? You're breaking God's Law. You're breaking the Ten Commandments, and God says you deserve punishment – not just from your parents, but from Him. You're under a curse because you *[do] not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*"

Number Seven – you shall not commit adultery. And, remember, Jesus said fantasizing about doing things, was just as good as actually doing them. So there are all kinds of ways you can go wrong with this commandment. Have you ever, mentally or physically, participated in *any* sort of sexual interest or activity with *anyone* who was not your spouse?

Friends, God has really, really high standards here – He commands perfection. And the fact is, most of us fail. Which means we're trapped. We're broken, we're damaged, we're compromised. We're not perfect. We're cursed. So what do we do?

Well, we're not done yet, and notice, we're only looking at half of the Ten Commandments.

Number ten – do not covet your neighbor's spouse or any of their stuff. So, ever compare your husband to someone one else's husband? Ever wonder why he can't be more like that guy? Ever look at your friend's gaming system and wonder why he has that and you don't? Ever look at your neighbor's new outdoor patio or car and think to yourself, 'must be nice to have that kind of money, I wonder what they're doing to be able to afford that?'

There's a way to see what someone else has and think 'that's great, it's awesome,' and to be happy for them. But far too often we see the things other people have and it creates a sense of envy, desire, and longing in us. 'If they can have that, why can't I?' That's coveting. And God says it's wrong. It breaks His laws, breaks His commandments.

So we're all guilty. We're all trapped. We're all condemned. We all fail God's test for life. And what are the consequences of our failure? If we show up on God's naughty list because there is no one who is perfectly nice and keeps all the religious rules, what happens next?

Well, in ancient Israel, there was a death penalty for breaking some laws, just as we have a death penalty for breaking certain laws today. Typically, in Israel, it was death by stoning – you would be taken outside the community and they would hurl rocks at you until you died. And, if the issue was particularly heinous, once you were dead, they would hang your body up on a tree, just outside the city, as a warning and reminder to other people.

Hanging from the tree did not curse you, it showed that you were already cursed. It showed that you had rebelled against God and His people and now you were deprived of all the blessings you could have experienced.

This is why Jesus was openly and publicly crucified. The Jews persuaded the Romans to put Him to death on a cross, effectively hanging His body from a tree – saying this man is accursed. And He was, but not by them, by God. Because God was using His death as the promised mode of salvation, God was using it as the moment of sacrifice – Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – He was being rejected, fully, by God, taking on the punishment and penalty that we deserve for all the times and ways that we have broken God’s laws and commandments.

He went through what should have happened to us even though He was completely innocent so that He could trade us – our wretchedness for His righteousness. Our sin for His salvation. Our failures for His forgiveness. There on the cross, Jesus took on the logical end of the law for us. He completely fulfilled it. Both mercy and justice were served. Justice because the law was fulfilled – our sins resulted in a curse – Jesus cried out ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ The Father turned away from the Son because the Son was standing in our place and we have all turned our faces from God.

Scripture tells us:

2 Cor 5:21 [God the Father] made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

It was, what Martin Luther called ‘the great exchange’ and surely, we received the good end of the deal. In Christ, we are forgiven, fully, freely, and forever. Think about those words, because they’re well chosen and important – you are forgiven, fully, freely, and forever in Christ – there’s nothing in you that He can’t cover or recover.

And now, as always, **the just shall live by faith**. We believe in what God has done, we believe it was necessary, and we believe that it is finished, that we have been adopted into the family of God by the sacrifice of Christ His Son. He kept all the religious rules for us, perfectly, and then went and made a sacrifice as if He broken them all so that nothing was left uncovered – every wrong we have ever done was included, and now we could draw near to God and experience blessings instead of the curse.

As Jesus celebrated Passover with the disciples, knowing that the moment of His own sacrifice was near, He prayed to the Father for them.

Flip with me over to John 17 and notice what he says:

John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 **And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only**

true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

My friends, The just shall live by faith...3 And this is eternal life, that [we] may know ... the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [He has] sent.

Today, we live, by faith, in Christ. We know the Father, and we have the hope of eternal life.

But that is not all

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us ... 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

If you have received Christ as the hope of your salvation, you have also received the Spirit of God through faith. He lives in you, comforts you, strengthens you, counsels you, guards you, directs you, gives you the gifts of the Spirit and produces the fruit of the Spirit in you – love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. In other words, God is teaching and training you how to live and He is drawing life out of you. He's there to forgive you when you fall, and to give the strength, encouragement, guidance and tools you need to live a life that is pleasing to Him and helpful to others.

And you receive all of that, not as a reward for your good behavior, hard work, or outstanding moral conduct, not because you kept enough of the religious rules - you receive it all, by faith, in Christ. Each week we're starting to understand a little more of what Paul meant when he said:

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

We are going to celebrate all of this now by receiving communion. We will hold in our hands reminders of how much God loves us and what He has done for us. We will remember that we don't bring Him anything, but we receive everything from Him. I hope you know what that means. But if you have any questions, please let us know. Come down front here after the service, go to the welcome table and tell them you want to talk to someone, or send us an email this week. We would love to help you find answers to your questions about God.

But for now, let's pray.