

“Counted as Righteous”

(Galatians 3:6-14 ~ Part I)

Introduction

➤ Satan seeks to counterfeit God’s truth, undermine God’s authority and challenge God’s will. From the beginning of humanity – when he asked Eve, “*Did God actually say ...*” (Gen.3:1) – Satan has tried to cast aspersions against God’s character. Satan loves to distort God’s Word, seducing people to believe anything but God’s truth and to follow anything but God’s will.

Writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, the apostle Paul said that “*we are not ignorant of [Satan’s] designs*” (2Cor.2:11). Jesus declared that the Devil “*does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him*” and that he “*is a liar and the father of lies*” (Jn.8:44). Satan does not care what you believe, as long as it is not the truth of God. Satan does not care how you live, as long as it is not according to God’s Word. Satan does not care who/what you worship, as long as it is not the one true God. Satan does not care who/what you follow, as long as it is not the Lord Jesus Christ.

➤ As Christians, we need to be discerning and not gullible. We need to be, in the words of Jesus, “*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*” (Matt.10:16). We need to not be “*tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*” (Eph.4:14). We need to not allow ourselves to be “*bewitched*” (Gal.3:1) by any false doctrine or false Gospel.

This is exactly what happened to the Christians in Galatia, and why the apostle Paul wrote this blistering letter rebuking them for their foolishness and calling them to reclaim the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For they were being deceived into thinking that they could not be saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They were being “*bewitched*” by false teachers, known as Judaizers, who taught that a person could not be saved unless they adhered to Jewish laws and customs – especially that of circumcision (see 2:3, 12; 5:3, 6, 11; 6:12, 13, 15). In short, they were “*turning to a different gospel*” (Gal.1:6) – a distorted Gospel (Gal.1:7) – which is, in reality, a false gospel (Gal.1:7; cf. 5:4, 7).

➤ This letter could not be more important, or more applicable, for our times. Today, there are seemingly endless attacks on the Gospel of Jesus Christ – from professing Christians and non-Christians alike. The Gospel is being attacked from all sides – from legalists and liberals, from the religious and irreligious, from moralists and secularists. As always, we desperately need to understand and heed the warnings of God’s holy Word. We need to faithfully believe, declare and defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

➤ The key, central, verse of the entire book of Galatians – the letter the apostle Paul wrote to “*the churches of Galatia*” (1:2) – is Galatians 2:16.

“... we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

➤ In chapters three and four, of his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) composed a series of arguments trying to rescue these Christians from the dangerous mire of a false gospel.

I. Paul’s defense of the Gospel – salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (3:I - 4:II).

➤ The beginning of chapter three marks a major transition in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In the first two chapters, the apostle gave a defense of his apostolic authority, and defined the Gospel he preached (which was the same Gospel preached by the other apostles, who had learned it directly from Christ Jesus). Beginning in chapter three, Paul defended and contended for the truth of the Gospel. His first argument was from their personal (conversion) experience.

A. The defense from personal (conversion) experience (3:1-5)

Paul's first appeal to the Galatians was for them to think what it meant to be saved. He wanted them to remember their conversion experience – before they were duped into thinking that they could (in any way) earn, or be deserving of, salvation. Seeking to awaken them from their self-righteous stupor, Paul – in rapid-fire succession – shells them with several probing, rhetorical, questions (i.e. six questions in five verses). Paul was exhorting the Galatians to remember the origin and means of their salvation; to remember that God's salvation cannot be earned or secured by one's own righteousness (righteous works).

I. Remember that God the Son alone was crucified for our sins (vs. 1).

In an attempt to 'snap them out of it', Paul gave them this sobering reminder: "*It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified*" (vs.1). He is exhorting them to remember that horrible and shameful death that Jesus died.

It is absolutely absurd (irrational/idiotic) to think that God would send His one and only Son to be crucified if we could simply be saved by (keeping/observing) works of the law. The Galatians knew well the horrors that Christ suffered on the cross, and they needed – desperately needed – to be reminded of the reasons for that horrific event. Jesus died on the cross in our place, for our sins (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21). To believe that salvation (in part or in whole) can be obtained by righteous/religious works, is tantamount to rejecting the cross of Christ and being separated from Christ.

Paul desperately wanted to break the Galatians free from 'the spell' they were under. He wanted to fixate their eyes back to the cross of Christ – to Jesus and Him crucified (see Gal.2:20; 5:24; 6:14; cf. 1Cor.2:2). The Galatians needed to be reminded, as do many today, that on the cross Jesus did everything necessary for salvation. Jesus is "the only and all-sufficient Savior." That salvation is not by works, but by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

2. Remember that God the Spirit is received by faith alone (vs. 2-4).

The second reminder Paul gave was that God the Spirit is received by faith alone. This, like the previous point, was also something Paul knew that the Galatians knew – for Paul had personally preached it to them.

The Galatians knew, from their own conversion experience, that they had received the Spirit of God not by their works but through their faith. They knew that both salvation and the Spirit of God come by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The Spirit of God cannot be earned. He is given, as God's gracious gift, to those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christians are not saved by good works, but unto good works (cf. Eph.2:8-10). Good works (righteous and obedient living) are the natural outpouring from the one who is truly saved (Jms.2:17).

✓ Illust: "The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life but is its source" (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 3:2-4).

3. Remember that God the Father alone gives the Spirit and grants salvation (vs. 5).

Salvation is a work of God – from first to last. God is the one who initially (sovereignly) enables a person to come to Christ (see Jn.12:39-40; Rom.8:7-8). God alone can awaken the one who is dead in sin (Eph.2:1), He alone can bring light to the one whose heart is darkened by sin (Jn.8:12; 12:46; Eph.5:8), He alone can open the eyes of those who are blinded by Satan (2Cor.4:4), He alone can empower us to live godly lives that are pleasing to Him (Rom.5:6, 8:7-8). To further secure our understanding that God is sovereign over salvation, we find that God's salvific work in those who believe occurred before they were even born – "*before the foundation of the world*" (Eph.1:4).

God the Father also “*works miracles*” (*energeō dynamis*) in those who believe, enabling them to be saved and to live according to His will. This could also be a reference to the miracles performed by the apostles to authenticate their God-given message of the Gospel.

B. The defense from Scripture (3:6-14)

After pelting the Galatians with (six) penetrating questions, showing them the error of their ways by their own personal (conversion) experience, Paul launches another attack – this time with six references from Old Testament Scripture. He was showing them, from God’s Word (no doubt as he had done before), that God’s salvation has always been by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

God’s saving grace has always been received through faith alone in Christ alone – Old Testament saints were saved through their faith in the Christ who was to come, and New Testament saints are saved through faith in the Christ who has come.

The six different Scriptures that Paul used underscored three important truths regarding the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. The saving faith of Abraham (vs. 6-9).

The Jews regarded Abraham as the father of the Hebrew people; the patriarch of Judaism. The Pharisees, for example, believed that simply being able to trace their ancestry back to Abraham was sufficient proof of their salvation – of warranting God’s saving grace (see Jn.8:33, 37, 39-40). Jesus exhorted the Pharisees by stating that they were spiritually not children of Abraham or of God, but children of the devil (Jn.8:37, 39, 42, 44).

It is very likely that the Judaizers sought to use the fact that Abraham was circumcised (Gen.17:24) as proof that circumcision was required for salvation. Showing that Abraham was saved before he was circumcised – and circumcised as an act of obedience to God, not a works-based righteousness, Paul declared:

Gal 3:6-9 ~ “just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’? ⁷Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And 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.’ ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

In making his case, Paul appealed to God’s Word – citing two difference verses of Old Testament Scripture in three verses of New Testament Scripture.

Scripture #1 ~ “[Abraham] believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (vs.6; Genesis 15:6)

The point of this reference is simple and straightforward: Abraham was saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone. His righteousness did not come from obeying the Law, but from the fact that he “*believed God*” (vs.6).

Gen 15:1-6 ~ “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ ²But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ ⁴And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ ⁵And 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.’ 6And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

The basis of Abraham’s righteousness was his belief (trust) in God. By grace, God accepted Abraham’s faith and declared him righteous. Abraham’s circumcision happened many years after God had “counted” (*logizomai*; reckoned, considered, regarded) him as righteous (see Gen.17:24). That is, God declared Abraham righteous based solely on his faith in God; not on his righteous/religious works.

Gal 5:6 ~ “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts [*ischyō*] for anything, but only faith working through love.”

✓Illust: “The Judaizers, like most other Jews of that day, had completely reversed the relationship of circumcision and salvation. Circumcision was only a mark, not the means, of salvation. God established circumcision as a physical sign to identify His people and to isolate them from the idolatrous, pagan world around them during the time of the Old Covenant. Circumcision is an external, physical act that has no effect on the spiritual work of justification. God gave the sign of circumcision to Abraham long *after* He had already declared him to be righteous because of his faith” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*; Gal.3:6-9).

The apostle Paul further elaborated on this truth in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

Rom 4:1-5 ~ “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness.’ ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted [*logizomai*] as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness”

Rom 4:9 ~ “Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted [*logizomai*] to Abraham as righteousness.”

This, as Paul stated, applies to all those who truly receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by faith:

Rom 4:20-25 ~ “No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²That is why his faith was ‘counted [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness.’ ²³But the words ‘it was counted [*logizomai*] to him’ were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be counted [*logizomai*] to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Rom.1:16; Gal.3:28-29)

Scripture #2 ~ “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (vs.8; Genesis 12:3)

Going back further in the Old Testament, Paul further showed that all believers – not just the Jews – would be saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone. To the Galatians he wrote: “*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And 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’*” (Gal.3:7-8).

Everyone who receives Jesus Christ is counted righteous by God. Like Abraham, all true believers are made righteous by the substitutionary atonement of Christ – He for our

unrighteousness and gave His perfect righteousness to all who would believe in Him (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21; 1Pet.3:18).

This, as Scripture reveals, has always been God's redemptive plan for mankind. Going back to the time when God first called Abraham (orig. "Abram"), Paul showed how God had promised to bring salvation to everyone who

Gen 12:1-3 ~ "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.'" (cf. Gen.18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Jer.4:2; Acts 3:25; Gal.3:16)

This "*Scripture*" is a proclamation of "*the gospel*" (vs.8), in which "*God would justify the Gentiles by faith*" (Gal.3:8). Contrary to what the Judaizers believed and taught, and what many wrongly believe and teach today, all believers have always been saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – Old Testament saints were saved through their faith in the Christ who was to come, and New Testament saints are saved through faith in the Christ who has come. This was the same "*gospel [preach] beforehand to Abraham*" (vs.8).

✓ Illust: "So Paul says, 'The Scripture ... preached' (Gal.3:8), even though God was the one doing the talking. This is one place where, as the great Princeton theologian [B.B.] Warfield (1851-1921) put it, 'God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them.' The Bible is God's word written ... The words on the pages of the Bible come straight from the mouth of God" (Philip Graham Ryken; Galatians; p.101).

Gal 3:26-29 ~ "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

Rom 4:23-25 ~ "But the words 'it was counted [*logizomai*] to him' were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be counted [*logizomai*] to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul summarized both Jews and Gentiles are saved not by works, but by faith: "*So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*" (vs.9). Paul's scriptural logic is unassailable: Since God has promised to save Gentiles by faith, then the Judaizers were wrong in trying to force the Gentile (Galatian) Christians to keep the law in order to be saved. Salvation has always been, and will always be, by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

2. The curse of the Law (vs. 10-12).

Not only did the Judaizers wrongly apply Abraham's circumcision to the means of his salvation, they also wrongly taught that one must keep the Law in order to be saved. They believed that they could obtain or secure their salvation by their good works. But Paul showed them, from God's Word, that the law does not (cannot) save – it actually curses.

Gal 3:10-12 ~ "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.' ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous

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

In biblical Greek, as in English today, the word “curse” is a serious and sobering word. The Greek word (*katara*) translated “curse” refers God’s active condemnation. The verb form of this word (“cursed”, vs.10; *epikataratos*) could literally be translated “to be cursed” or “to have a cursed put upon you.” This is not at all similar to our English concept of “mild profanities” or even being cursed at. The curse of God is the absolute opposite of the blessing of God.

2 Peter 2:14 ~ “They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed [*katara*] children!”

✓ Illust: “The curse to which Paul refers is nothing less than exposure to the unmitigated wrath of God Almighty. It is a frightful and dreadful thought, eclipsed only by the reality that this is the destiny of all those who do not live by faith in Christ” (R.C. Sproul; “The Curse of the Law”).

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians (1:8-9), Paul used a different Greek word with a similar meaning. The word “accursed” (*anathema*) is used to describe those who are cut-off from God; cursed or (eternally) condemned by God. This word is used six times in the New Testament (Acts 23:14; Rom.9:3; 1Cor.12:2; 16:22; Gal.1:8, 9). Here it could be aptly translated, “let him be condemned to hell!” (NET).

Gal 1:8-9 ~ “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed [*anathema*]. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed [*anathema*].”

In verses 10-12, we find three different Old Testament Scriptures that Paul used to show that keeping the Law does not save but actually condemns – “*For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse*” (vs.10).

Scripture #3 ~ “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (vs.10; Deuteronomy 27:26)

Since no one can obey the law of God completely, and all have sinned against God (Rom.3:10-12, 23), everyone falls under the just condemnation of God for sin (Jn.3:18, 36; Rom.5:12; 6:23). Again, as Paul made clear by citing Old Testament Scripture, this has always been true.

Deut 27:26 ~ “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”

Those who set aside the grace of God, in hopes of being saved by their own righteousness (law-keeping) unwittingly place themselves directly in God’s just condemnation and wrath. In doing so, they quite literally attempt to be their own savior and reject the one true Savior from God.

Gal 2:19-21 ~ “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I 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. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Gal 5:2-6 ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated

to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

Rom 3:20 ~ “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

James 2:10 ~ “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

A person can either come to God on their own merit (self-righteous, religious pursuits), or on the merit of Christ through faith. Those who come on their own merit are cursed, justly condemned, by God as sinners. Those who come to God receiving Christ’s righteousness through faith are blessed, justly saved, by God as righteous (2Cor.5:21).

✓Illust: “The Judaizers wanted to seduce the Galatians into a religion of legal works, while Paul wanted them to enjoy a relationship of love and life by faith in Christ. ... The law cannot justify the sinner (2:16); neither can it give him righteousness (2:21). The law cannot give the gift of the Spirit (3:2), nor can it guarantee that spiritual inheritance that belongs to God’s children (3:18). The law cannot give life (3:21), and the law cannot give liberty (4:8-10)” (Warren Wiersbe; *NT Commentary: Galatians*; 3:10-12).

Scripture #4 ~ “The righteous shall live by faith” (vs.11; Habakkuk 2:4)

Similarly, prophesying the Word of God, Habakkuk declared that salvation comes by faith alone:

Hab 2:2-4 ~ “And the Lord answered me: ‘Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.”

Writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, Paul gives the correct understanding of Habakkuk’s prophetic words: “*Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for The righteous shall live by faith*” (vs.11).

True spiritual life comes by faith, and not by works. The true Christian is one who is saved by faith and lives by faith. The true Christian knows that, apart from Christ and the sanctifying work of the Spirit, there is nothing good that dwells in them (Rom.7:18). The Christian’s salvation is, from first to last, a work of God. God saves and sanctifies the one who puts their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and trusts in Christ’s righteousness and not their own.

Scripture #5 ~ “The one who does them shall live by them” (vs.12; Leviticus 18:5)

From the book of Leviticus, Paul reminded the Galatians Christians that a person is saved unto good works, not by good works (Eph.2:8-10). God’s saving grace is received by faith, not earned by works.

Lev 18:1-5 ~ “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. ³You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. ⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.’”

This passage, and passages like them, are often ripped out of context by legalistic and self-righteous Christians. As Paul made clear, it is the one who is truly saved by faith who lives according to God's will and Word (not the other way around).

Conclusion

➤ Using God's holy and inerrant Word, Paul showed that God's saving grace has always been received through faith alone in Christ alone – Old Testament saints were saved through their faith in the Christ who was to come, and New Testament saints are saved through faith in the Christ who has come. For, as we will see next Sunday, Christ alone redeemed us from the curse of the law (vs.13-14).

Gal 2:16 ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”