

“Counted as Righteous”

(Galatians 3:6-14 ~ Part 2)

Introduction

➤ “In a small village somewhere in England there once stood a chapel, and over the arch beside it was written the words: ‘We Preach Christ Crucified.’ For years godly men preached there, presenting a crucified Savior as the only means of salvation.

As that generation of godly preachers passed on, there arose a different generation who considered the cross and its message too antiquated. So they began preaching salvation by Christ’s example rather than by His blood, ignoring the necessity of His sacrifice. Meanwhile, ivy had crept up the side of the arch and covered the word crucified, the arch now reading, ‘We Preach Christ.’ And they did preach Him, but not as having been crucified.

Eventually people in the congregation began to question the practice of confining the sermons to Christ and the Bible. So the preachers began to give discourses on such topics as social issues, politics, philosophy, and moral rearmament. The ivy continued to grow until it wiped out the third word, rendering the phrase simply, ‘We Preach’” (John MacArthur; *A Simple Christianity*; p.81).

➤ This story serves as an appropriate (illustrative) epitaph for many churches throughout history, and many churches in America today. For all too many Christians churches, and Christians, have forsaken the preaching of “*Christ crucified*.” They have sacrificed the faithful proclamation of the Gospel on the altar of political correctness, secular psychology, worldly philosophies, and a “Christless Christianity.” For the sake of popularity and acceptance, or out of a fear of persecution, they have chosen to preach a false gospel – which is no gospel at all (Gal.1:6-7).

1 Cor 1:22-24 ~ “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

1 Cor 2:1-2 ~ “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

➤ Paul’s letter to the “*churches of Galatia*” (1:2) could not be more important, or more applicable, for our time. 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.

The Gospel is not just for evangelism or new Christians ...

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:I-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).

1. 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 who's 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 defense – 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 *long 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)

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

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. Everyone who receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is counted righteous by God. 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, from God's Word, that the law does not (cannot) save – it actually curses (vs.10^{2x}; *katara/epikataratos*).

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.’”

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)

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

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

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; Jms.2:10). True spiritual life comes by faith, and not by works. Again, as Paul made clear by citing Old Testament Scripture, this has always been true.

The true Christian is one who is saved by faith, and lives by faith. Paul reminded the Galatians Christians that a person is saved not by good works, but unto good works (Eph.2:8-10). God's saving grace is received by faith, not earned by works. No one can be saved by simply keeping the law of God, for the law does not/cannot save, it actually condemns – *“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse”* (vs.10).

3. The redemption of Christ (vs. 13-14).

There is no salvation apart from receiving, by faith, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. All humans are justly condemned by God – under the curse of God – as sinners. In the Bible, the concept of being cursed by God is to be under the severity of His divine judgment and the *“consuming fire”* of His just wrath (Heb.12:29). The ‘curse of God’ is the absolute (polar) opposite of the ‘blessing of God.’

Matt 25:41 ~ “Then [the King] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

✓ Illust: “If you really want to understand what it meant to a Jew to be cursed, I think the simplest way is to look at the famous Hebrew benediction in the Old Testament, one which clergy often use as the concluding benediction in a church service: *‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace’* (Num. 6:24-26). ...

The supreme malediction would read something like this: ‘May the Lord curse you and abandon you. May the Lord keep you in darkness and give you only judgment without grace. May the Lord turn his back upon you and remove his peace from you forever’” (R.C. Sproul; sermon: “[The Curse Motif of the Atonement](#)”, 2008; copied from book “Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology”, p.141-142).

Five times in just two verses (vs.10^{2x}, 13^{3x}) Paul used the Greek word referring to the “curse” of God, or being “cursed” by God (*katara/epikataratos*).

Gal 3:13-14 ~ “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’ – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

Pulling no punches, the apostle was trying to show the Galatian Christians the error of their newfound belief in a false gospel. He was not trying to boost their self-esteem, to bolster their self-confidence, or assuage their guilt. He trying to save them from the brink of a self-righteous and damning legalism.

This is the bad news of the Gospel, which must be understood before someone can truly understand the Good News of the Gospel [“Gospel” (*euangelion*) means good news]. That is, for those who think they are (or can be) good enough to earn (in part or in whole) God’s salvation, the message of the cross of Christ is absurd and unnecessary – “*then Christ died for no purpose*” (Gal.2:21) and “*of no advantage*” (Gal.5:2). A gospel of works is no Gospel at all; it is a false gospel which cannot save and can only condemn.

In these verses (3:13-14), we find three distinct aspects of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

a. [What He did \(vs.13a\)](#)

After clearly explaining that every human is utterly sinful and completely unable to save themselves, that everyone one is a sinner and justly cursed by God, Paul simply, yet profoundly, declared: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law*” (vs.13a). The Greek word translated “redeemed” (vs.13; cf. 4:5; *exagorazō*) carries the imagery buying a slave’s (or debtor’s) freedom. In this context, Christ “redeemed” the sinner who was enslaved to sin (Rom.6:17, 20) and thereby justly cursed (condemned) by God.

God’s penalty for sin is physical and eternal death. Everyone is a sinner, and justly sentenced by God with the “death penalty” of eternal condemnation.

Rom 6:23 ~ “For the wages [*opsōnion*; what one deserves or has earned] of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As the Bible makes clear, there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. There must be an appropriate payment for sin. However, not just any death can satisfy God’s just wrath for sin.

Heb 9:22 ~ “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Heb 10:4 ~ “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

The Old Testament sacrifices were a symbol, an ever-present reminder, of the need for there to be a perfect (spotless) life sacrificed for sin. Since Jesus Christ lived a perfect – absolutely sinless – life, He is the one and only perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus lived the (sinless) life that we could not live, and died the death that we deserved to die.

1 Peter 1:18-19 ~ “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (see Jn.1:29, 35; 1Cor.5:7)

Eph 1:7 ~ “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (see Col.1:13-14)

Heb 9:12 ~ “he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” (see Heb.9:13-14; Rom.3:23-25)

Because Jesus was absolutely sinless, and the Son of God who was sent by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice for sin, His substitutionary death on the cross completely satisfied God’s wrath toward all who would believe. Through His sinless life, substitution death and supernatural resurrection, Jesus *“redeemed us from curse of the law”* (vs.13a).

b. [How He did it \(vs.13b\)](#)

How did Christ redeem sinners from the curse of the law? In verse thirteen we read the amazing, glorious and sobering, answer: *“by becoming a curse for us”* (vs.13b). On the cross, Jesus bore the full weight of God’s wrath for sin. Though sinless, Jesus was treated as if He committed all the sins of all who would ever believe. He incurred the penalty – shedding His blood – for our sin.

✓Illust: “God is too holy to look at sin. He could not bear to look at that concentrated monumental condensation of evil, so He averted His eyes from His Son. The light of His countenance was turned off. All blessedness was removed from His Son, whom He loved, and in its place was the full measure of the divine curse.

All the imagery that betrays the historical event of the cross is the imagery of the curse. It was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled that Jesus not be crucified by Jews; He had to be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. He had to be executed not by stoning but by Gentiles outside the camp so that the full measure of the curse and the darkness that attends it be visited upon Jesus.

... At midday [God] turned the lights out on the hill outside of Jerusalem so that when His face moved away, when the light of His countenance shut down, even the sun couldn't shine on Calvary. Bearing the full measure of the curse, Christ screamed, *“Eli, Eli lema sabachthani, that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”* (Matt.27:46).

Jesus took that occasion to identify with the psalmist in Psalm 22 in order to call attention to those looking upon the spectacle that what they were witnessing was really a fulfillment of prophecy. ... His cry was not ... the cry of a disillusioned prophet who had believed that God was going to rescue him at the eleventh hour and then felt forsaken. He didn't just feel forsaken; He was forsaken. For Jesus to become the curse, He had to be completely forsaken by the Father. ...

It was as if there was a cry from heaven, as if Jesus heard the words ‘God damn you,’ because that's what it meant to be cursed and under the anathema of the Father” (R.C. Sproul; sermon: *“The Curse Motif of the Atonement”*, 2008; copied from book *“Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology”*, p.141-142).

By His love, mercy and grace, God sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sin (Jn.3:16-18; Rom.5:8) – and Jesus went willingly to the cross (Jn.10:18; Heb.12:2)! Though perfect, Jesus *“became a curse for us”* (vs.13b). Though sinless, He became sin for us. Theologians refer to this as “the great exchange” or “the blessed exchange” – his perfection is imputed (or credited or reckoned; cf. 3:6) to us, and

our sin is imputed to Him. Through His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross, Christ bore the penalty for our unrighteousness and gave to us His righteousness.

2 Cor 5:21 ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

1 Peter 3:18 ~ “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”

Isa 53:4-6 ~ “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus is the only person to be absolutely sinless. Jesus is the Savior; He never needed a Savior! He perfectly fulfilled all of God’s requirements, obeyed all of God’s commands. He, therefore, died on the cross not for His own sin but for the sins of all who would ever believe. This is referred to as His “substitutionary death” (or the “substitutionary atonement” of Christ). Meaning, Jesus died in our place for our sins. God treated Jesus as if He had lived our sinful lives, and God treats those who are saved as if they lived Jesus’ perfect life.

Once again, Paul supported his assertion with Old Testament Scripture: *“for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’”* (vs.13b).

Scripture #6 ~ “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (vs.13; Deuteronomy 21:23)

Deut 21:22-23 ~ “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.”

This does not mean that every person who is ever crucified is cursed by God, but that crucifixion is a sign (a symbol, a reminder) of God’s curse and punishment for sin. For the Jews did not crucify criminals, but stoned to death. To be crucified, therefore, symbolized being cast out of God’s chosen people as condemned by God. Crucifixion was a sign pointing to our need for the sinless Savior to be condemned in our place, and for our sins.

c. [Why He did it \(vs.14\)](#)

In verse fourteen, we read the answer to the question, “Why did Jesus redeem us from the curse by becoming a curse for us?” The immediate, obvious, answer is that Christ redeemed us so we could be redeemed – He became a curse for us so that we would no longer be cursed! That is, Jesus died on the for our sins so that we could be freed from the penalty of sin.

Notice how Paul (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) explained the reason for Jesus becoming a curse for us: *“so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith”* (vs.14). Once again, Paul is showing that salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is, and has always been, God’s redemptive plan for mankind – for both Jews and Gentiles.

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.”⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Gal 3:28-29 ~ “There 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.²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ (alone) as Lord and Savior will be saved – no matter their ethnicity/race, social status, or gender. The Christian receives “*the promised Spirit*” (vs.14) – the saving and sanctifying work of the Spirit of God indwelling in us – “*through faith*” not by works (vs.14).

➤ Through the redeeming work of Christ – His sinless life, sacrificial death, and supernatural resurrection – those who would receive Him as Lord and Savior are no longer under the curse of sin. For Christ became a curse for all those who would believe, bearing the full weight of the penalty of sin and the wrath of God – the righteous for the unrighteous.

Rom 8:1-4 ~ “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

➤ Christ came to save us because we could not save ourselves. No amount of good works (or law-keeping) can warrant or secure God’s salvation. The only way a person can be truly righteous before God is in and through Jesus Christ. Salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

Conclusion

➤ We must not let the ‘ivy’ of worldly philosophies or Christless religion shroud the message of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ – salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – the unmitigated and unadjusted Gospel. We are to faithfully proclaim the Gospel, defend the Gospel, and live out the Gospel in our daily lives. As a (local) church, and as Christians, our anthem must be: We preach Christ crucified!