



## **FREED IN CHRIST**

### **Galatians 3**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Galatians 3. Galatians 3 is one of the most complex, complicated passages in all of Paul's writings in the New Testament. There's one verse in here, Galatians 3:20. One commentator said, "There are 300 different possible interpretations for that one verse." That will bless your heart when you see that at the beginning of the week, and you think, "Okay, like I'm going to go through all 300 of them," and that's just one verse.

So, this week has been challenging, and I think this morning is going to be challenging for us. I think texts like these test us, in a sense. They...and they check us. They make sure that we're not coming into the Word always looking for an easy, simple, entertaining, "Just give me a principle to live by so I can move on with my life," kind of mentality that we come to the Word.

What happens when the Word doesn't give us that simple, entertaining kind of, "Here's the very practical take"? Although I think there are practical ramifications in here, but really, the goal of this text is to give us a picture of Christ, and texts like these check our hearts to make sure that Christ is enough. We want to dive into the rich, theological truths that are in a text like Galatians 3, because we really want to see Christ; we want to know Christ, and when we do, I think we find that the journey is worth taking.

The way I would picture this text, and I want to kind of frame it today, is instead of a marathon, I want us to imagine we're climbing a mountain, and we're going to work pretty hard and get to one peak, and we're going to have a nice view there. Then, we're going to climb to a second peak that's even higher, and we're going to have a nice view there, but the goal is to get to this third peak, the Mount Everest, so to speak, in Galatians 3. I promise you that once we get there, it'll be one of those moments where you get to the top and you look around, and you say, "Yes, yes, this was why I spent all that time climbing." So, you ready to climb? Here we go.

Galatians 3. What we're going to do is we're going to read through...I'm going to read, actually, not through the whole chapter, but through 25 verses. I'll go ahead and warn you, you're going to be listening and thinking, "I don't get it. I don't get it. I'm not sure where this is going.", but just stick with this thing and we're going to see the Word come alive this morning, I hope, in a way that transforms our lives, maybe even transforms our lives for all of eternity.

Galatians 3:1, Paul writes,

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you*

*now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing - if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*

*Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

*Brothers, let me take an example from every day life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to your seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.*

*What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.*

*Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.*

*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith is come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

Three peaks: the first peak is going to deal with Abraham, the second peak is going to deal with Moses, and the third peak, the Mount Everest of this text, is going to deal with Christ, and so we're going to see how they build on one another and lead us to Christ, to the end.

## God's Covenant with Abraham ...

So, let's start with the first peak: God's covenant with Abraham. God's promise shows us the necessity of faith. God's promise shows us the necessity of faith. This is the first mountain peak. Remember, Paul...if you've been here the last couple of weeks, we're studying this book where Paul is writing to a church where there were some false teachers; they were called Judaizers, and these were people who were claiming, "Okay, you can believe in Christ, but then you need to be circumcised, you need to follow this Jewish rule or this Jewish regulation in order to be saved."

So, they were adding requirements to salvation. What happened is, we saw last week...if you missed last week, let me encourage you to go back and dive into the end of Galatians 2, maybe listen to that sermon, because it's key for understanding the rest of the book of Galatians. Paul introduces the doctrine of justification by faith alone. So, he introduces it at the end of Galatians 2, and then he starts to defend it in Galatians 3 and 4. So, he's basically not bringing new material to the table today. He's reiterating what he's already started to develop, but he's bringing it to bear on what these Judaizers, these false teachers, were saying.

So, what he does is he goes back to Abraham, and he says, "Okay, you guys talk about circumcision. Let's go back to where this whole circumcision deal started with Abraham, and let's see how he was justified." He begins to talk...begins talking about the promise of God to Abraham that is received by faith. Look in verse 6, "*Consider Abraham...*" he says, "*He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteous.*" Anybody know where he's quoting from there? He's quoting from the Old Testament. What book? Genesis 15...remember, just a little note at the bottom, tells you...gives you the answer; immediate Bible scholarship, just like that. "Oh, yeah, Genesis 15:6, like a piece of cake. What you got next?" Well, look at verse 8, "*The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'*" Where's he quoting from there? Genesis 12:3. It's like you just went to seminary and back, just like that.

So, let's hold our place here in Galatians 3 and let's go back to the very first book of the Bible; go to Genesis 12. What Paul is doing here in Galatians 3 is he is showing the necessity of faith. He starts in Galatians 3. I'll show you what he's doing while you're finding Genesis 12. He starts by giving six just rapid-fire questions to the churches in Galatia. He says, basically, "Did you receive all that you had by observing the law, by your obedience, or by faith?" He's making the case; it's rhetorical questions to show them it's all by faith, and that's when he reaches back into Abraham and says, "Look at Abraham."

What he's doing is he's building this picture that we see all throughout the New Testament that everyone who's a part of the people of God is in the line of Abraham. The people of God in the Old Testament began with Abraham. He's the father of the people of Israel, and that plays out in the local church and new covenant that we are sons of Abraham.

I don't know...there was a song when I was growing up in church that we would sing, sometimes as kids, "Father Abraham had many sons, many..." You know that song? I'm not going to sing it, but you know it. "Many sons had Father Abraham, and I'm one of them, and so are you, so let's just...right arm," and then you start doing these weird motions, like what does the right arm have to do with Father Abraham, and by the end of the song, you're doing this right here, and singing about Father Abraham.

Some of you did not grow up in church, and this is one of those moments where you're actually thankful that you did not. God's grace is evident in not doing that, but that's the picture. "Father Abraham had many sons; many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord." We're all sons of Abraham. That's the picture that Paul is building on.

So, he said, "Let's go back to Abraham and let's see how Abraham received the promise of God." Look at Genesis 12:1; listen to what God says to Abram, *"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'"* Now, listen to the promise. Verse 2, God says, *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* That's a stout promise that He just gave to Abraham.

Now, don't miss it. Abraham had done nothing to deserve this. For all we know, Abraham was a pagan guy who was not seeking after God. This is initiated by God.

So, here's the first part of the covenant with Abraham that I want to highlight here. By grace alone, God blesses His people. It's not based on what Abraham had done, but based on the initiative and the grace of God, God makes this covenant with Abraham. It's not Abraham going to make a deal with God; it's God coming to Abraham, making a covenant with Abraham.

This is even clearer over in Genesis 15. Look at Genesis 15. What happened is God just said in Genesis 12, "All nations on earth are going to be blessed through you, Abram," but the only problem is, Abraham didn't even have a son. He didn't have any heir in his own family. How's he going to have a line that's going to bless all nations, when he can't even have a son with his wife Sarah? Listen to what happens in Genesis 15:1,

*After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."*

*Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*

### **By grace alone, God blesses His people.**

Here it is: this is where Paul quotes from in Galatians 3, *"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."* Now, we're going to think about this in just a second, what was going on and how Abram was receiving the promise. By grace alone God blesses His people, and that grace is expressed in radical promises...radical promises. We see this all throughout Abraham's life, and it's evident right here. God just said to Abram, "You're going to have as many descendants as the stars in the sky, innumerable," but he doesn't even have a son yet.

Not only does he not have a son, but he's 99 years old at this point, and his wife Sarah is 90 years old. You do the math. Things are not looking good. Sarah is not maternity shopping at this point; this is not a very hopeful prospect. In fact, when she hears that she's going to have a child, she rolls over laughing, as anybody would. However, this was

the picture here. It's not what Abram or Sarah bring to the table; it's what God is bringing to the table by His grace...radical promises by His grace.

In fact, you go further in Genesis 15, and you see there was in that day, when you were entering into a covenant or an oath with someone, what you would do...seems kind of weird to us today, but it was part of the sacrificial picture there in the Old Testament. What you would do is you would take animal sacrifices, and you would take the...cut the animal sacrifice into parts, and you would put part of them on one side and part of them on another side, where they were facing each other, and there was room in between. What would happen is, the two parties that were entering into a covenant with each other, an oath with one another, they would walk together in the middle, symbolizing the oath, the covenant that was taking place; they would walk together through that.

You get down to Genesis 15, that's what starts happening. In verse 9, *"[So] the LORD said to [Abram], 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.' Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other..."* just like...just like we just mentioned. Look at verse 12, *"As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him..."* The Lord begins to speak and to give him promises of blessing. Then, you get down to verse 17, it says, *"When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day, the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said..."*

So, this is how God symbolizes His passing through those pieces, but what's Abram doing when God's passing through? He's snoozing; he's sleeping. He's not walking through. This is a unilateral covenant, so to speak. This is God saying, "Based on my grace, I am initiating a covenant with you, and though you bring absolutely nothing to the table, you will receive my blessing."

### **Through faith alone, God's people receive His blessing.**

Now, the question is, how will he receive the blessing of God? The answer leads us to the second part of God's covenant with Abraham. By grace alone, God blesses His people; through faith alone, God's people receive His blessing. Through faith; by grace through faith. This is what Paul is talking about. This is how Abraham received the blessing of God, not by earning it or meriting it. He received it. He believed what he heard. Abraham did not do a thing. Instead, he believed something. More accurately, he believed Someone; he believed God. That's what verse 6 says that Paul quotes in Galatians 3, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

The same picture that's used, that we talked about last week when the righteousness of Christ was credited to us, same picture here; righteousness before God credited to Abraham based not on what he has done, but based on what he has believed. Abraham believed God. It's what Romans 4 talks about. It says, *"Without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver..."* the Bible says, *"...through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God."* I love this phrase, *"...being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."*

That is why it was credited to him as righteousness, Romans 4 says. It was credited to him as righteousness. The righteousness of God credited to him because he believed God had power to do what He had promised, through faith alone. This is what Paul is talking about with these Judaizers. He says, "Yes, he was circumcised, but when was he circumcised? After he was justified by faith or before? He was circumcised after."

It's not until Genesis 17 that Abraham gets circumcised. That's what he...Paul talks about it earlier in Romans 4. Romans is kind of a commentary on Galatians 3; really the whole book, they just go together. However, Paul says, "It was not after Abraham was circumcised, it was before he was circumcised," before he even did that. He was already justified by faith, not based on what he'd done, but based on what God had done in his life, based completely on His grace; by grace alone through faith alone.

This is the picture that Paul is establishing. He even quotes later in Galatians 3 from Habakkuk 2:4. I wish we had time to turn to all these different places, we just don't have time to turn to all of them, but in Habakkuk 2:4, the Bible says, "*The just shall live by faith.*" The just live by faith.

This is the verse that just turned Martin Luther upside down. He was living in a day, if you could imagine, a day when the Pope had said, in one particular church in Rome, had stairs that were supposedly sacred stairs; long, long, high stairs that led up to the front of this church building, and the Pope was selling indulgences. The church was saying to the people, if you could imagine a church saying, "If you will pay money, and you will climb up these stairs, and you kneel at every stair, and you kiss the stair, and you pray, and when you do that and you get to the top, you will have all your sins forgiven. Either your sins, or maybe you can do it for someone else." Raising money is what they were doing.

Luther went to Rome, and he saw this happening, and he joined in. Everybody was flocking...this is what the church said you need to do in order to be right before God, and so Luther found himself climbing. He said...his son later said, it was at that moment, when he was on those stairs that Habakkuk 2:4 was brought to his mind, "*The just will live by faith.*" Not by climbing stairs to try to get your way to God. So, Luther immediately stopped what he was doing, went back to Wittenberg and the Protestant Reformation was the result. The just will live by faith. By grace alone God blesses His people; by faith alone, God's people receive His blessing.

Now, I want to pause here for just a second because it's at this point that the question comes in. "Okay, if all I have to do is believe God...if you're saying today, if the Bible is saying today to every person in this room, that you can have the righteousness of God credited to you simply by believing in God, by trusting God right now, without doing anything, trusting in God through Christ..." We'll see later how even this picture in Abraham is pointing us to Christ. "...trusting in God through Christ, every single person in this room has the opportunity to have the righteousness of God credited to us, no matter what we have done, no matter what we might do, simply based on faith?"

Then, the accusation comes in, "Well, what about the way we live? Doesn't that lead to loose living; people just doing whatever they want?" The reality that Scripture teaches is that's not the case. Those who know they have been saved by grace alone through faith alone live radically different lives than the rest of the world, because they realize they are not just saved by faith; they live by faith.

This faith is expressed in radical obedience. Think about Abraham...just Abraham. He is justified by faith. What happens after that? After that, he's circumcised. After that, even back in Genesis 12, before he was even circumcised, God gave him this promise, and what did he do? He packed up his bags, and he said, "God, I'll go wherever you lead me." He leaves his family and all that was familiar to him behind. Talk about radical; selling all your possessions. He leaves everything behind. He goes into a foreign land where he's living in tents. He's trusting God to lead him every step of the way. This is radical living by faith.

You get to Genesis 22...turn over to Genesis 22. Remember what happens there? Abraham finally did have that son that God had promised: Isaac. So what does God say to Abraham? "Abraham, I want you to take your son and..." do what? "Kill him; sacrifice your son. Abraham, the son that I promised you, that now has been given to you, I want you to slay him." What does Abraham do? He does it...or almost does it, until God stops him. He takes his son up on a mountain, and he raises the knife over his son. This is not somebody who was just justified by faith back in Genesis 12 or Genesis 15. This is the guy who's living by faith in Genesis 22, and it's living a radical faith.

Listen to Genesis 22:15. God stops him, *"The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven and said a second time,"* verse 16, *"I swear by myself..."* Now, pay attention to this close; this is huge. *"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore."*

Do you notice something a little fishy there, that at least causes us to pause? Because we've been talking all along about how this was all by grace through faith, and God says to Abraham, "Because you did this, because you were obedient, now I'm going to bless you." Doesn't that seem to be a disconnect? Does this mean that now Abraham's earning the blessing of God by what he does?

The answer is, "Absolutely not." Instead, he's living by faith. It's the same picture. He's got a promise from God; he's got trust in God; he's believing in God, and his life is the outworking of that kind of faith. It's not trying to earn salvation; it's living by faith. It's the whole picture in Hebrews 11. You get this "Hall of Faith," these heroes of faith, who were doing extraordinary things. Listen to Hebrews 11:33,

*Through faith men and women conquered kingdoms...they shut the mouths of lions, they quenched the fury of the flames, they escaped the edge of the sword. Some were tortured and refused to be released. Some faced jeers and flogging; others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them.*

People who live by grace through faith live radically different lives than the rest of the world...completely different lives. Why? Because they believe God, and they know they don't need the stuff that we hold onto in this world, because they know God is good, and they know God is all satisfying, and the comforts that this world has offered are no longer precious to them, because God is precious to them, and they want God, and they believe God. They believe He's enough for them, and so they're not saying, "Well, I've got grace through faith, so I can just indulge in sin and indulge in the things this world says are most pleasurable and live however I want." No, that's not living by grace through faith. People who live like that know so little of grace and so little of faith.

The reason we don't live radical lives like Hebrews 11 talks about is because we lack faith. We need to believe God; to believe that He is good, and that He is worth risking everything for, risking our lives for. He's that good. When we believe God, that's the life that flows from faith.

Illustration: John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the most widely read books in all of Christian history. Bunyan's story, when he was in his 20's, he was a member of a church, and by all accounts was not a Christian. Now, people would have said, "Yeah, that's

a Christian," but he was wrestling, he was struggling over his salvation, struggling to find victory over sin and peace with God that he was longing for. He was working, he was trying, like so many people in the church; trying...trying to get right before God, trying to have peace before God, trying, trying, trying.

He said he got to a point, and he wrote,

One day, as I was passing into a field, this sentence fell upon my soul: "Your righteousness is in heaven." And I thought with all I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. "There," I say, "was my righteousness." So that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, "He lacks righteousness," for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse. For my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself.

He looked up to heaven and he saw, "He's my righteousness. I don't have to work, not to try to make myself right. He is my righteousness, and He is before God on my behalf."

He said, "Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons, my temptations fled away, and I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God." It hit him; salvation hit him. He knew by grace through faith, through the righteousness of Christ, nothing that I bring to the table.

Do we know this? Do we see Christ in heaven as our righteousness, the only way by which we could stand before God? This is why Galatians 3...Bunyan said...Bunyan said Luther's commentary on Galatians, which I've quoted from numerous times in this series and will continue to...Bunyan said Luther's commentary on Galatians is the most precious book to him in his life, apart from the Bible. He knew this picture of living by faith, justified by faith.

So, how did he live? Well, he lived preaching this gospel. There came a time when the government said, "If you keep preaching the gospel, you will be thrown into prison." That did not quiet the mouth of John Bunyan; he kept preaching, and he was thrown into prison. He had a wife and four children, one of whom was blind. His wife was pregnant. While in prison, his wife began having complications with her pregnancy. They had said, "Bunyan, if you stop preaching, we'll let you out." Bunyan said, "I can't stop preaching." His wife ended up having a miscarriage.

For the next 12 years, Bunyan stayed in prison, not because he was earning salvation, because he believed God. This was with a life of faith that was being played out in him. He knew grace. His whole autobiography he titled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and he knew faith. Listen to what he wrote from jail. He wrote, "I am indeed in prison." He also wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from jail. "I am now in prison in body, but my mind is free to study Christ, and how unto me he is kind. For though men keep my outward man within their locks and bars, yet by the faith of Christ, I can mount higher than the stars. Their fetters cannot spirits tame, nor tie up God from me. My faith and hope they cannot lame, above them I shall be."

God give us faith like that. God give us faith that materialism in this world can't strip us from, because we know God's good, not stuff. God give us faith that sin in this world can't strip us from, because we know God satisfies, not this indulgence or this pleasure that we're tempted to go back to. No, He's good. I believe you God; I believe you're good. God, help



us to see that salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, leads to radical obedience to Christ. God, help us to put these together.

Galatians can help, especially in Galatians 5 and 6, put this together, but we need to be delivered from a Christianity that says, "I claim grace," and indulges in stuff that the world does. That's not grace, and it's not faith, and this is the whole point.

## **Key Truth ...**

So, here's the picture. First mountain peak: Abraham receiving the blessings of God, by grace alone through faith alone. That leads us...Okay, coming down from that peak, time to go up the second one: Moses. God's covenant with Moses.

Now, we need to throw out a truth that is key for us to grasp before we see this covenant with Moses. What the Judaizers were saying back here in Galatians 3...turn back there with me, Galatians 3. What the Judaizers were saying was, "Okay, Abraham: faith. We see that, but then God gave a covenant with Moses that involved the law." So, what the Judaizers were saying was, "He used to operate with His people based on grace through faith, but now He's put the law. So, now here with Moses, He tells us what we need to do in this picture."

So, they were saying that what happened in Moses trumped what happened with Abraham, changed the whole picture around. What we need to realize, this key truth: God's covenant with Moses does not contradict His covenant with Abraham. This is huge. God's covenant with Moses does not contradict His covenant with Abraham. Instead, God's covenant with Moses complements His covenant with Abraham. This is big, because we're about to see some contrast between what happened with Moses and with Abraham, but we need to realize, God's not contradicting Himself.

This is what Paul in Galatians 3:15, 16, and 17 is talking about. He said, "This does not nullify what happened with Abraham. In fact, what God did with Moses helps us understand better what God had done with Abraham. They complement one another."

## **God's Covenant with Moses ...**

So, with that in mind, let's climb to this second mountain peak: God's covenant with Moses, and here's the truth that comes to the front. Now, with Abraham, God's promise shows us the necessity of faith. With Moses, God's law shows us the futility of the flesh. That's a loaded sentence; let me unpack it a little bit. God's law shows us the futility of the flesh.

What Paul does all throughout, you notice here in Galatians 3, is he mentions the law over and over and over again. Now, sometimes in the New Testament, when we see the law mentioned, it's talking about the whole Old Testament. Sometimes it's talking about just the Ten Commandments. Sometimes it's talking about even just the will of God, or the authority of God. However, most of the times when Paul uses this word, especially here in Galatians 3, he's referring to the commandments and the requirements that were given to Moses back in Exodus and seen in Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. That whole picture in the Old Testament, that's the law that Paul's referring to.

That's important because, when we see Galatians 3 talk about the law, it's not talking about just the Word of God in general, all this whole picture. It's talking, specifically, about this covenant that God had made with His people in Moses' day, that would carry the people throughout the Old Testament. However, I want to point that out, because I think there are definitely some implications for how we understand God's Word, based on how we're supposed to understand the law, but we can't forget that Paul's primarily talking about what He did with Moses, and the law He gave to them.

So, what happens is in Galatians 3:10...and he kind of circles around it, back and forth, back and forth, all the way to verse 25...he starts talking about what the law cannot do. "The law can't bring life;" Paul says, "the law can't bring salvation; the law can't bring righteousness; the law can't do any of these things."

So, he gets to verse 19, that's a key verse. Look at Galatians 3:19. He says, "*What, then, was the purpose of the law?*" Why do we have the law, then, if it can't bring life, or can't bring righteousness? What's the purpose? He says, "The purpose is to show us the futility of the flesh."

Now, what I mean and what Paul means when he...in Galatians, and he mentions the word "flesh"; this is our sinful nature, is the flesh. It's that...it's the part of us that does not have Christ, does not want Christ. It's before we come to faith in Christ, we are dominated, controlled by the flesh, by the sinful nature. It's that...on a practical level, it's that part of each one of us that says, "I'm the authority in my life. I call the shots, and I know what's best, and nobody needs to tell me what to do. I know what's going to bring the best result; I know what I can enjoy most. I'm not going to stand before a judge to give an account for the way I live my life, so don't even try to tell me what to do."

It's Eve in the garden saying, "I'll eat the fruit I want to eat." It's each one of us, every single one of us in this room, that says, "I'll do what I want to do, and I'll make the calls; I'll be the authority in my life." That's the picture of the flesh. We're going to see later on in Galatians how the flesh wars with the Spirit in the believer. However, the picture here Paul is talking about is how the law shows us the inadequacy, the weakness, the futility of the flesh in a couple of different ways.

### **We all disobey the law of God.**

First of all, the law shows us that we have disobeyed it. We disobey the law of God. This is Galatians 3:10. Galatians 3:10, "We disobey...we all," every single one of us in this room disobeys the law of God. "*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse,*" Paul says, "*for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'*"

What he does is he quotes there from Deuteronomy 27. God's law said, "Anyone who doesn't follow everything in this law is cursed." The law demands perfect obedience. That's why Jesus would say at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, or the end of Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, and He's talking about Old Testament law. He gets to the end, and He says, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" That's the standard: perfection. We disobey the law of God. The law confronts us with the fact that we can't obey it perfectly. Not one of us in this room can.

So, what the law is doing here is a couple of different things. First of all, the law is exposing our sin. The law exposes our sin, brings sin in our hearts to light. There's so much we could unpack here. If we went to Romans 3 and 4 and 5, and the picture is, what the law does...even 6 and 7 there in Romans...what the law does is it confronts us with the

commands of God, and brings the sinful heart that is below the surface in every single one of our lives, and brings it out to the core.

Illustration with children: a child has a heart, has a desire to say, "I'm going to do whatever I want." So, that's there, and it's lying kind of dormant until command comes, and dad says something to son, "Caleb, don't do this." He looks back, and he says that dreaded, two-letter word that he should not say; one of their favorite words at times, "No. No, I'm not listening to you; I'm going to do what I want." So, he does it. Now, that heart that said, "I'm in control," is dormant, so to speak. You didn't see it until the command came, right? When the command came, sin sprang to life; rebellion sprang to life, and you see it. It exposed the sinful heart, "No, I'm in control," and that's when dad steps in and says, "No, no, no, you're not in control."

That's the picture here; it's what happens. The law of God confronts every single one of our hearts with commands from God, and we resist it. We do things our own way, and the law exposes our sin. Not only does the law expose our sin, but the law actually intensifies our sin; it makes it worse. This is what Paul says in Galatians 3:19. He says, "*The law was added because of transgressions.*" We don't have time to talk about the nuances of the language there, but basically, what Paul is saying is the law increases transgressions. The same thing he says in Romans 5:20, "*The law was added so that the trespasser's sin might increase.*"

So, as the law exposes our sin, it brings sin to the light more and more and more and more. We resist the law, and we sin, and it comes out, and it's just a spiral effect, and our hearts are growing harder and harder and harder toward God. Were it not for grace, they would continue in that way. God, thank you for grace. It keeps me from continually resisting the law.

### **We all deserve the wrath of God.**

This is the picture: the law intensifies and exposes our sin, and as a result, confronts us with a cruel, harsh, stunning reality. Not only do we disobey...all of us disobey the law of God, but as a result, we all deserve the wrath of God. Now, follow with me here. This is the part where it's easy to tune out, talking about wrath and judgment and anger. This is what Paul says, "*All who rely on observing the law are under a...*" what? "*A curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'*" We stand cursed beneath the law...cursed. This is what the law confronts us with, the fact that you and I are cursed before God.

This is where Moses helps us out a lot, this covenant with Moses. Remember Abraham? God gives a promise to Abraham, what does He say? "I will..." what? "I'll bless you." "I'll bless you." "I'll bless you." "I'll bless you." Good news...blessing everywhere. Then, you get to Moses in Deuteronomy 27, which Paul quotes here, and what happens is, he says, "When you go into the land, you're going to go beyond the Jordan, and there's going to be two mountainsides there, and half the tribes, you go stand on this side of this mountain, and the other half, you go stand on this side of the mountain, and you face one another."

He says, "Here's what you're going to do. Half of you are going to pronounce blessings on the people of God: blessings in this way, blessings in that way. The other half are going to pronounce..." what? Anybody remember? "Curses." Imagine this scene: thousands of people gathered on two mountainsides. One pronouncing blessings, and the other side yelling out, "Cursed is anyone who does not obey his father or mother." Now, that will help with Caleb. "Cursed." You know what everybody does on the other side? They yell, "Amen." "Amen," and it's hard to get an amen with something good. Now, you throw something bad

out, and people are yelling "amen"? Then, they say, "Cursed is everyone who leads the blind astray." "Amen." "Cursed is the one who does this; cursed is the one who does that." They're yelling out, "Amen."

You get to the end of Deuteronomy 27, that's when you have this verse that Paul quotes, "*Cursed is everyone who does not do everything written in the Book of the Law.*" "Amen," that's what they're yelling out. Blessings and curses back and forth, blessings and curses, and this is the picture. The law was given to show us that, because we disobey the law of God, every one of us stands beneath the curse of the law. We're cursed. What does that mean? It means we stand condemned before God; condemned before God. This was the whole point of the law. It's not good to be standing before a Holy God and to be confronted with sin. It's not a good thing, because now...to be confronted with the law, because the law exposes our sin before a holy God, and we are standing there before God, who is dead set against sin, a God who is set to judge sin, who eternally hates sin, and we are covered in it. The law has confronted that. Thanks a lot, law, for bringing this to the surface before God.

This is why Luther said, "The principal point of the law is to make men not better, but worse. That is to say, to show men their sin, that by the knowledge thereof, they may be humbled, terrified, bruised, and broken. And by this means, may be driven to seek grace." In other words, he says, "When the law does it's work, you go running for cover, because you know you've got a major problem."

This verse right here, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law...*" that should sound to us like an announcement that there are a hundred nuclear warheads headed right for the United States at this moment. What are we going to do? Where are we going to go? How do we...how do we adjust to this? This is urgent. We are under the curse, condemnation before God. Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What does every sin deserve?" The answer is, "Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come." You know what's most scary about that verse, though? It doesn't say, "Cursed are the atheists, or the agnostics, or cursed are the pagans who just run off in immorality." It says, "Cursed are the people who try to obey God."

What is that about? Cursed are those who try to bring the law to life in their life, thinking that this is going to bring them life. Cursed are those who...let's use contemporary terminology...who go to church. Who go to church...not stay home, but who go to church, or who read their Bibles and pray and try to do good things, and try to lead their family and do things right, because at every turn, in every attempt, do you know what the law says to every attempt? "Guilty." It says over and over again to every one of us in this room, "Guilty. Guilty. Guilty." It keeps saying it, "Guilty." You try harder the next time, "Guilty." You try harder next week, "Guilty, still guilty." Next year, "Guilty."

Does that make you feel hopeless? That's what it's supposed to do. If it doesn't make us feel that way, we're missing the point. That's what the law does. It says, "Stop trying, because you're not getting it right. Why? Because you can't." The law was not given to help you make it right. The law was given to show you that you're disobedient to it, and as a result, you stand under the curse and condemnation of God. That's the purpose of the law that Paul is highlighting here.

Now, the question...it begs the question, "Why is he telling us this?" The reason comes in Galatians 3:22, 23, and 24. Listen to this, "[*But*] the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin..." Prisoner of sin. You get down to verse 23, "*Before this faith came, we*

*were held prisoners by the law...*" Here's the picture: God through the Word says...Paul is saying here, "We're like prisoners chained by the law. The law exposes our sin at every turn, and the law intensifies our sin, and there's nothing we can do. We are chained; we are chained before God. We can't get out; we are under His curse and His condemnation. We can't do anything. The harder we try, the worse it is." Paul says, *"Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed."* So, the law was put in charge to lead us to who? Christ, that we may be justified by faith.

So, here's the picture: Here we're sitting chained in our sin and in our inability to obey God or be right before God, based on anything we do. We're cursed, condemned in our sin, and here stands Christ, and He is completely righteous. He has no sin in Him. He is a lamb without blemish or defect. He is right before God, He alone, and He steps in, and He says, "I'll take the curse for you, and I'll take condemnation for you."

## **God's Covenant through Christ ...**

Now, we're approaching Everest. The first peak: God's covenant with Abraham, the necessity of faith; it's by faith. The second peak, God's covenant with Moses, the futility of the flesh. The third peak...mountain peak...Everest of Galatians 3: God's covenant through Christ. God's Son shows us the price of freedom. The whole point of the law has been to send us on our faces before Christ, saying, "We need you to save us. We need you to break us free from these chains of sin that are in me, the chains that are holding me captive completely and will hold me captive for all of eternity unless you save me."

### **Jesus fulfills the law of Moses.**

That's the picture, and it brings both of these covenants together into one glorious reality. What happens is, Jesus fulfills the law of Moses. This is what everything in the Old Testament was building to...everything. All the ceremonial laws, all the rituals and sacrifices they would do...all these different things. Hebrews...the book of Hebrews says, *"They are all shadows pointing to one substance, and that substance is Christ."* Romans 10:4 says, *"Christ is the end of the law."* Matthew 5 says...Jesus says, *"I came to fulfill the law, to complete the law."* Jesus fulfills the law of Moses.

How does He do that? Number one, He obeys the law of God for us. He lives right...righteously by faith, perfectly righteous. There is no other person in the Bible, and no other religious teacher in the history of the world that can claim righteousness before God based on their own merit. No one. You cannot name one other person in all the history of the world that can be righteous before God, based on their own merit. Only Christ.

He obeyed the law of God for us, but not only did He obey the law of God, even having obeyed the law of God, He endured the wrath of God instead of us. He endured the wrath of God instead of us. Galatians 3:13 says He redeemed us. *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."* Those two words, "for us," circle them. They are two of the most beautiful words in all the New Testament. "For us," "for you"... "for you." Not just the person beside you, or in front of you, or behind you. Right where you're sitting, you stand cursed and condemned before God in your sin, and Christ took the curse for you. He shed His blood for you. He died for you. He gave His life for you. He took the wrath of God due your sin upon Himself for you. He did this for you. This is the picture.

He redeemed us. This is a word Paul uses; it's a word that was used in that day to describe how you would pay the price to buy a slave so you could set that slave free. Paid the price; he took the curse upon Himself to set you free. He endured the wrath of God instead of us.

What do we say to that? One hymn writer said, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior, or I die." That's what the law does. The law says, "You've got to have Christ. You need Christ; you're desperate for Christ. He is everything."

### **Jesus completes the promise to Abraham.**

He fulfills the law of Moses, but not just the law of Moses. He completes...Jesus completes the promise to Abraham. He's the seed. You look in Galatians 3:19, it says, "*[The law] was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.*" Who's that seed? You go back up to verse 16, and it says, "*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed.*" Not seeds, many people, but one seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

This is the picture. This is why, when you get to the book of Matthew, you don't start with a beautiful Christmas story that we would read every year. Instead, you start with a bunch of names. What's the point? Who sits around on Christmas morning reading names? However, this is the point: He is from the line of Abraham. He's from the line of Abraham. He lived perfectly, righteously by faith, in the line of Abraham. He fulfills the promise that was made all the way back in Genesis 12. Through Him...through Him all nations of the earth will be blessed, and His death, His resurrection from the grave...all nations, people in Birmingham, Alabama, can be credited righteousness before God. Because of Him, we receive the blessing of God.

Christ completes the promise to Abraham. Everything in Abraham is pointing to Christ. You get to John 8:56...this is a great verse. John 8:56, Jesus is speaking to a bunch of Jewish leaders, and He says, "By the way, Abraham saw my day, and he was glad when he saw it." That's a bold statement. "Abraham was looking forward to me," and that's the whole picture. All throughout the Old Testament, how are people saved in the Old Testament before Christ came? They're saved the same way we are, by grace alone, through faith alone. We've seen that, but it's in Christ alone. They're looking forward to Christ. Maybe they didn't know all the ramifications of this whole picture, how it would play out, but they're looking to Christ in the way we look back to Christ.

It's why Hebrews 11 talks about Moses regarding disgrace for the sake of Christ...connecting Moses and Christ. They're all looking ahead to the promise of Christ. That's the picture. He completes the promise to Abraham. Everything points to Christ...everything.

By grace alone, He gives salvation to us. Paul is saying here in Galatians 3, "What are you going to do to earn your salvation? In light of this gigantic, monumental story that all centers on Christ, do you really think your being circumcised makes that big a difference?" No, do not add to the work of Christ. He is your righteousness. Believe Him, trust in Him. By grace alone, He gives salvation to us.

This is so huge. It's stunning, really, because it separates Christianity from the whole landscape of religion in the world, because this is not...ladies and gentlemen...this is not a system of moral improvement that we have in the Bible. This is not a systematic way to make your life better, to work and follow these principles to your best life. This is not how to be more moral, more good. It's not the point. The point of Christianity is you can't do that,

and your need is not for a better life; your need is for a new life. Your need is not to try to work harder and be better, and check off boxes, and make sure you're there on Sundays, and make sure you're going through the routines, and make sure you're doing things the way you're supposed to do them. No, be free from that; be free from that.

Don't try to improve yourself; crucify yourself. Slay yourself. That's what he said in Galatians 2:20, "Crucified with Christ. I no longer live...dead. Instead, Christ lives in me. He is everything; He is my righteousness, and He is my joy; and He is my peace; and He is my life. He's my everything." This is what Christianity is designed to be. It all revolves around not us becoming better, it revolves around Christ becoming everything...everything. By His grace, not by what we do. This is good news. You don't have to do anything to make this happen.

By His grace, He gives salvation to us, and through faith alone...now, this is where it gets good. I want to pause here for a second. Through faith alone we receive...now remember, this is what we talked about in the Old Testament, Abraham...through faith alone, God's people received His blessings, but the blessing here in Galatians 3 is radically different; it is beautiful is what it is.

Look at it in Galatians 3:14. Listen to this, *"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles..."* We're mostly Gentiles in this room. *"...through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive..."* blessing? No, not just blessing, *"We might receive the promise of the..."* what? *"Spirit."* By grace alone, He gives salvation to us; through faith alone, we receive His Spirit in us and that changes everything.

Not only are you looking to the righteousness of Christ in heaven as the basis by which you stand before God, but the righteousness of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is actually put in your heart to radically change your life now, not from the outside in, but from the inside out, and Galatians is going to show us the ramifications of that in the coming chapters, but here is what I want us to do. The primary purpose of the Spirit in us is to glorify Christ; to continually turn our hearts, and our minds, and our affections, and our lives toward Christ, who is everything for us.

So, I want to invite you this morning...I've prayed for this moment, because I know that there are John Bunyans across this room. Church members who, for however many years, have been trying to get it right, trying to make it right, struggling and wrestling for victory over sin and peace with God, and just not finding that peace. Trying harder and harder this year, next year, and the next year, and the next year, and I want to invite you to stop; to let what happened in Bunyan's life happen in your heart at this moment. Look to heaven and see the righteousness of Christ, and know that you are counted righteous simply by trusting in Him. That you are right before God, and you have peace with God, simply by trusting in Him and believing...believe God and it's credited to you as righteousness. What an astounding, awe-inspiring truth that right here in this holy moment; that you might believe God, for the first time, in Christ like that, and for the first time, not based on anything you have done, or anything you will do after this, but you are accredited righteousness.

What an amazing thought, so do it. See Him, believe Him, and it's credited to you as righteousness. Those of you who know Him and know that He's your righteousness, you know you're a Christian, and reminds you as you're struggling with sin, in whatever way that looks in your life in this room, know that the point of the text today is not to tell us to go out and do better this week than we did last week. The point is to tell us, "Go to Christ; you can't do it without Him." You need Him. He is your victory; He's your peace. His Spirit

lives in you to give you victory. You're wrestling; you're struggling with doubt; you're walking through things; you just can't put it all together. Don't try to figure it out on your own and make this work, "If I could just do this and this and this. I just need time to work on the..." No, fall on your face and your heart before Him and say, "I need you. I need Christ. I see Christ, and He's my everything, and all I want is Him."

Let us fix our mind's attention, our heart's affection on Christ, maybe for the first time in your life, to see Christ in this way. For maybe the first time in a long time to be reminded of this picture of Christ. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. He is the apex, and the goal of Christianity is not for us to walk out and think, "What can I do better?" The goal of Christianity is for us to glimpse Christ in all of His glory and praise Him, and that's what we're going to do.

Let's look to Christ and let's exalt Him as the goal of our salvation, as our righteousness, our desire, our satisfaction, our life, our everything. Lord Jesus, you alone are supreme.

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