

Christ Reformation Church

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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

***“How God Saves us in Christ –
The Big Picture”***

November 3, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 3

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 27

Introduction-

All of us have had those “Aha!” moments when the Big Picture suddenly became clear to us and all of the previously confusing details started to fall into place. “Oh, now I understand!” In many ways, what makes a good teacher is having the

ability to see the big picture for yourself and also then to enable others to see it.

Apart from understanding the Big Picture of the Bible, this is going to remain one big confusing book. And if that is the case, the gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s marvelous way of saving sinners, is going to also be obscure.

Here in Galatians 3, as in several other places in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul gives us the Big Picture of how God saves sinners and thus how He sets this entire fallen creation right. This is vital for every Christian to thoroughly understand, yet many do not and as a result, like the Galatians, they fall prey to false teachers and a false gospel.

Here is a great description of a false, works-based legalism that has crept into many churches today. It was written by a lady who was commenting on the recent announcement that Doug Phillips, head of Vision Forum and, in my opinion, teacher of a false works-based gospel,

had resigned due to sin: “When it has become:

- *Roles and rules instead of love and liberty*
- *The system instead of the Savior*
- *Following Pharisees instead of following Fairest Lord Jesus*
- *Controlling others instead of controlling yourself*
- *The earthly father instead of the Heavenly Father*
- *Silencing and shaming instead of giving voice to the victims*
- *Intimidation instead of inspiration*
- *Authoritarian dogma instead of authentic dignity*

... then it's time to “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face.”

That lady knows Christ. She recognizes a false gospel, unlike the Galatians and unlike so many Christians today. The reaction she will

meet from many professing Christians is probably something like this—



Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?
~ Galatians 4:16

Review of 3:1-6

Now you recall that last time we looked at 3:1-6,

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

Here we saw that Paul's rhetorical questions were asked in order to

drive home the point that reception of the Holy Spirit, and thus regeneration, union with Christ, justification and all other aspects of salvation, is by *hearing the gospel with faith*. In addition, *living in Christ is also by faith, not by works*. We are not made “more perfect” before God by our own performance.

This is the great error of that Vision Forum “gospel” and of so many Christians today. Let me give you another contemporary example from a book called Fake Someone Happy that was pointed out to me last week. It is the account of how a girl in England got all caught up with a very legalistic, patriarchal group in the U.S., to be specific: Vision Forum and its followers. One of these families (the Wilsons) paid a visit to Marian and her family in England, and one afternoon:

Marian: We’re going to take some of the children for a walk.

Marian should have been more specific. Rather than take the little girls out in the sunshine, Mrs. Wilson said she could take all six! Will offered to help. He pushed a double pushchair down the hill with Christopher on his heels, followed by Marian with three little

girls wanting to hold her hands. The oldest, Ann, lost out to her younger sisters.

Ann: What’s this flower called?

Marian: I think it’s called columbine.

Ann: Don’t you know?

Marian: Well, no. I don’t know every flower by name.

Ann: Why not? You should know. Well, what’s this?

Marian: That’s ... I don’t know.

Ann: But you’re so old. How can you be so stupid?

Marian suddenly “remembered” that she knew a great many more names of flowers and she matched them, quite indiscriminately, to the flowers Ann presented on the walk.

Further along, the strange party passed the Halcombe’s nearest pub. All the children erupted as one.

Wilson Children: Heathen juice! Heathen juice!

Will and Marian looked at one another and both thought that they could do with some “heathen

juice”, if they were going to survive the rest of the day.

Newton, Charlie (2013-06-19). Fake Someone Happy: The true story of the damaged daughters of American patriarchy and their emotional abuse (Kindle Locations 406-423). . Kindle Edition.

The book is filled with accounts of the many, many laws made up by people in this group and foisted upon thousands of families as equivalent to Scripture. Little wonder Paul warns us:

Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Enter, Abraham

Now, at verse 6 Paul turns out attention to Abraham:

Galatians 3:6-9 just as **Abraham** "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? (7) Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of **Abraham**. (8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to **Abraham**, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." (9) So then, those who

are of faith are blessed along with **Abraham**, the man of faith.

Abraham, Abraham, Abraham. What is up with this? Well, it is in and through Abraham that God's plan to save us and create for Himself a holy nation, a new race of a new humanity, a new Eden – is effected. Abraham is not our Savior of course. Christ is. But Christ's work is all wrapped up in Abraham and the Seed of Abraham, as we are about to see.

Let's consider first what Paul has said here in vs 6-9.

1. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, which is the gospel of salvation by faith alone. We already heard him quote the very same Scripture in Romans 4.

Romans 4:1-3 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

2. Therefore, "hearing with faith" has always been God's way of salvation – the ONLY way of salvation.

3. All who hear the gospel and believe are said to be sons of Abraham. Including Gentiles.

4. The blessing promised to Abraham would extend to people of all the nations, not just to the Jews.

5. When we become a son of Abraham, what was promised to him becomes ours as well. WE are blessed as HE is.

Therefore, whatever this way of salvation is, it entails us becoming a son of Abraham, and this happens when we hear the gospel and believe. No works, no circumcision required.

Now Paul adds more details about all of this-

Galatians 3:10-14 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." (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." (13) 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"-- (14) so that in

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

In contrast to being blessed with Abraham through faith, Paul calls us to consider the plight of anyone who trusts in their own works. In the case of the Galatians, they were being told that they needed to be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic Law. But Paul demonstrates from the Law itself that this only leads to being cursed by God, damned by the Law itself. It is a ministry of death.

1. Paul quotes here from Deuteronomy 27 which we read earlier:

Deuteronomy 27:26 "'Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

This is the last curse of the many curses of that chapter. It is a summation of the message of the Law. Unless a person keeps ALL the Law, perfectly doing them, he is cursed. And therefore the Law only curses and damns. Apart from faith alone in Christ alone, we are doomed.

Cursed. That word hearkens our thinking away back to Eden, doesn't it? God pronounced Adam, Even, and

the serpent cursed. In Adam, we all were cursed. Nothing we can do could change that. And therefore:

“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law...”

The Law itself says, *the righteous shall live by faith*. The Law by its very nature and purpose is not of faith. It is not a message that tells human beings to put their faith for righteousness in something outside themselves. No. It is a command to *do*. And so it only curses.

2. Paul cites still another passage from the Law itself to confirm this: *“Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”* That comes from –

Deuteronomy 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, (23) his 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 was still another part of the Law then that pointed to Christ. This is what happened at the cross. This is how Christ redeemed us. HE was cursed by God with the curse that was

on us. It was no mere accident then that the Romans killed Christ by crucifying Him on a “tree.” He became a curse *for us*.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (6) All 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.

And so, by citing these statements directly from the Law itself, Paul proves to the Galatians and to us that righteousness before God NEVER comes through the Law and never was intended to come through it.

In Christ Jesus then (vs 14) this “blessing of Abraham” is made available to all people of all nations, not merely to Jews, because it is by faith, not by the Law.

See this same thing regarding the cross in Colossians:

Colossians 2:11-14 In him also you were circumcised with a

circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (12) having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (13) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

You see how the Spirit is all wrapped up in this promise. We receive the Spirit by hearing the gospel and believing, and then the Spirit circumcises our old heart of stone and gives us a new heart, joining us to Christ so that we die with Him and are raised with Him. This is the reception of the Spirit Paul is talking about.

Notice also this “nailing it to the cross.” The “it,” as we have seen before, is the condemning, cursing pronouncement of the Law against us. Christ became that curse, taking it upon Himself, and HE was nailed to the cross, dying at the Law’s demands. So that the record of debt, of OUR debt and all of the legal, condemning demands of God’s holy Law which

were justly upon us, are canceled. Price paid. That is what the cross was all about.

And remember, people who reject Christ, people who set themselves up to trust in their own goodness, are treating the Son of God, the cross of Christ, with derision and contempt.

“Promise” is of Faith by Definition

Alright, Paul now moves on to develop his argument even further. The blessing of Abraham was *promised* to Abraham by God. And this word *promise* is a very significant, loaded theological term at the very heart of the gospel. Promise is the very opposite of Law.

Galatians 3:15-18 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. (16) Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. (17) This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. (18) For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but

God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Let's think our way through this:

1. When contracts or covenants are made even by fallible human beings, they are expected to be kept according to their original terms. You don't annul it or add additional requirements to it. Of course not. Well, when God made that promise to Abraham, God's promise stands. *Nothing has changed.* It was of faith then and it remains unchanged. The terms of the promise are simply, *I will do this. You just need to accept My promise.*

2. Now verse 16. Christ is the "seed." Paul shows us that the Word of God is very specific. Even the singular here is intentional and important. One Seed. The Seed promised clear back in Eden.

Genesis 13:14-16 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, (15) for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your **offspring** forever. (16) I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your **offspring** also can be counted.

This means that God always intended to fulfill the promise to Abraham through Christ. Through Christ, who was born physically as a Jew, a seed of Abraham, and who then takes our sins upon Himself at the cross, joining us to Him when we hear and believe in Him. Thus the Seed of Abraham is at the same time ONE (Christ) and yet many (as the sand of the sea, as the dust of the earth, as the stars of heaven). That's US! By faith WE become, you might say, Christ – THE son of Abraham.

Righteousness comes then through Christ, not through the Law.

3. Look at verse 17 again-

Galatians 3:17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

There was Abraham, away back maybe around 2000 BC. Paul says that the giving of the Law at Sinai was 430 years after the promise to Abraham. But this changed nothing. God's way of blessing Abraham and all of Abraham's sons through Christ by faith alone, stood. No change of plan here. ALL who hear of Christ and believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are counted as righteous before God. One

way. Not one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. No. Only one. By the promise.

And notice – a promise is always dependent upon the one who makes the promise. If I promise you something, it is up to ME to do it, not you. The Law is not like that, but the very opposite. It is a command to YOU and YOU must do it.

In verse 19 Paul will deal with the obvious question: *Why the Law then?*

4. So here is the necessary conclusion-

Galatians 3:18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

God cannot go back on His Word. His promise stands. So when these false teachers at Galatia add the Law to the gospel, they are actually calling God a liar. They are saying that He does not keep His promises.

The Inheritance

Notice still another very important biblical term here that is right at the center of our salvation in Christ: *inheritance*.

The promised blessing to Abraham – a land, a great nation made of people

from all nations – comes to us by way of *inheritance*. Have you ever noticed how often the Bible speaks in terms of inheritance?

- In Christ we become *sons* of Abraham
- Thus we are the *heirs* of Abraham
- Men, women, Jew, Gentile are all *fellow heirs* in Christ.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is how God saves us! He makes His promise of a new, renewed, sinless humanity living forever in a new, renewed creation, to Abraham and to the Seed of Abraham (Christ). And all who hear of this gospel and believe it become sons of Abraham. And since they are sons, they are heirs of all that is promised to Abraham. Here are some verses that describe this inheritance:

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

Mark 10:17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up

and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Acts 7:2-5 And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, (3) and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' (4) Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. (5) Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

Romans 8:14-17 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Ephesians 1:11-14 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (12) so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (13) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Conclusion

With all of this understood then, listen to the very same message given to us by Paul in Romans 4:

Romans 4:9-25 Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. (10) How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

(11) He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the

father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, (12) and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

(13) For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (15) For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

(16) That is why it depends on faith, **in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring**--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (17) as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (18) In hope he believed against hope, that he should

become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

(19) He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. (20) No distrust 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.

(22) That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

(23) But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, (24) **but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,** (25) who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

There is the gospel. It really is very, very good news.