EXPOSITION OF GALATIANS

We have many people in our church who are retired. They worked for a set amount of years and then they decided to retire. Some worked for companies that offered them a retirement package. Some worked for companies that had some 401k retirement program to go along with the retirement package. But almost all who retire get a social security check every month.

Now suppose one day you open up a letter you got in the mail telling you that your social security check is a gift. Suppose you got a letter that says this is a gift from us, the government, to you, the citizen. Here is the gift we are giving you, which is your social security check. You would say wait a minute, this is not a gift, I earned this. You cannot classify something you earn as a gift. You cannot call something you work for a gift.

When it comes to God, there are many people who think they can work their way to heaven. They think they can earn it. There are many people who think if we give it our best shot to be as good as we can they will earn heaven. God will put their good works on a scale and measure it against His holiness and they will earn heaven. Paul says no you cannot and will not ever be able to earn heaven because heaven is not for sale. You cannot earn it; to get there you must be given a gift.

Now a key question in regard to heaven is this–how good does one have to be to go to heaven? The Biblical answer to that question is you have to be as righteous and as good as God to go to heaven because heaven is His eternal place; it is His home and to get into His home, you have to meet His standard of righteousness.

Now of course the problem for all of us is we cannot possibly ever be as righteous as God because we are all sinners. It is absolutely impossible for people with sin natures to keep a perfect, holy law of God.

This is exactly why Jesus Christ died on the cross. He died in our place. He died for our sins. He died to give us a righteousness we could not ever have, which is His own righteousness. The moment you place all of your faith in Jesus Christ, God declares you righteous and gives you the righteousness of His own Son and He actually sees Jesus Christ living in us.

Some people who go to church just do not get this point and some of those people were going to the churches in Galatia. Galatians is the first book Paul wrote and Paul wrote this book to defend grace truth. In Galatians 3:10-18, Paul drives home a key point:

NO PERSON WILL EVER BE RIGHTEOUS IN GOD’S ESTIMATION BY HIS WORKS OR HIS ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE O.T. LAW; BUT ANY PERSON MAY BE MADE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
What is actually on the line here is God’s calculation of us; not our calculation of ourselves or others calculations of us. The main issue at stake here is how can one be right with God so that he may go to heaven? The answer to that question is not by keeping the Law, but only by faith in Jesus Christ. Now in this text there are two critical theological points Paul makes:

**THEOLOGICAL POINT #1** – Any person who believes he may be made righteous in God’s sight by keeping the Law is cursed. 3:10-12

Any person who thinks he may be right with God by his ability to keep the O.T. Law is under a curse. *What this means is that in the mind of God that person is legally and judicially living life under a curse that will end in eternal condemnation.*

Any person who thinks he can be right with a Holy God by his or her law-keeping ability is one who is living life under a cloud of a curse of God that will never end with him being right with God.

In these verses there are three reasons why one who tries to keep the Law is under a curse:

**Reason #1** - Because one is cursed who does not keep “all” the Law. 3:10

Now we may observe that it is stated that one is cursed if one does not “abide by all things written in the book of the law.” Now that verb “abide” is a present tense verb. **So Paul says if a person does not continually keep all things in the Law all of the time, that one is cursed.**

If a person has ever missed one thing in the O.T. Law just one time, we are guilty and we are under a curse. **The O.T. Law will not and cannot justify any person, but it will show every person that he/she deserves condemnation.**

James said, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). The point is clear here, if a person has not continually kept all of the O.T. Law perfectly, that person is guilty of breaking the Law and condemned.

The O.T. Law is not some “religious cafeteria” where people may go and pick and choose a few things they like. That O.T. Law is that which reveals the perfect holiness and righteousness of God, which one needs to live with God. So to be right with God by keeping the O.T. Law you have to continually keep every jot and tittle of it or you are guilty of missing the mark of the righteous standard of God.

Now we could give example after example of how we all have missed the mark of keeping the Law of God. But let’s cite a few:

1) Exodus 20:17 - “you shall not covet.” Paul said he coveted every kind of thing (Rom. 7:8). Ever longed for something someone else has?
2) Exodus 22:25 - If you lend money, “you shall not charge interest.” Ever done that? Ever given a loan to someone and charged interest?

3) Exodus 22:28 - “you shall not curse a ruler of your people.” Ever done that? Ever said terrible things about a President or politician?

4) Leviticus 5:1 - You shall not keep quiet if you know some person has sinned. Ever done that?

Have you kept all of the O.T. Sabbath days and special feast days? Have you kept the Sabbath year in which you stop working every seventh year?

If you have missed the mark just one time, you are guilty of breaking the Law of God. Suppose you fall off a cliff and grab onto a chain that has ten links to it. How many do you have to break to kill yourself? The answer is one. Break just one link and it is all over.

People want to pick and choose a few laws and then think they are really right with God because they keep a few laws. What they don’t realize is they have missed keeping so many laws that they cannot possibly be right with God.

Let me illustrate a point. One time there was a man who boasted that he had kept the Law by not drinking any wine or any strong alcoholic beverage. This person made this boast on a fragment of a verse he cited in Numbers–Numbers 6:3a. He was telling people that he kept the Law, until he ran into someone who read the rest of the context. The person challenged him by saying have you ever drank grape juice (Num. 6:3b)? Have you ever eaten any raisins (Num. 6:3c)? Have you ever had your hair cut (Num. 6:5)? Have you ever gone to a funeral (Num. 6:6), even the funeral of a close relative (Num. 6:7)? The person was shocked. He was boasting about how he kept the Law and he hadn’t even got close. Now of course we know the passage in Numbers is about a special, temporal Nazirite vow, which is not even designed for governing Grace Age life. But it proves the point. We have all missed the mark and if we are trying to keep the Law to be right with God, we are under a curse.

Reason #2 - Because the Scriptures say that one is justified by faith and not by the Law. 3:11

Paul quotes a lot of Scripture from the O.T. because he is proving a point that justification by faith alone was something even seen in the O.T.

In verse 10, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 to prove that justification cannot be by the Law; and in verse 11, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to prove that justification must be by faith.

One is cursed if one thinks he can be right with God by keeping the Law because this kind of thinking is contrary to what God’s Word actually says. The truth is even the O.T. Law taught that no one could possibly keep the Law and that is why there had to be an entire sacrificial system given to Israel so that God could cover their sin. Even Habakkuk 2:4 says in the O.T. that the only way to be justified is by faith.
No one was saved in the O.T. by keeping the Law. You will not find in the O.T. one person who was saved by keeping the Law. At the heart of the Mosaic Law system were animal sacrifices that shed blood. Why is that? It was because no one could be righteous by keeping the Law.

You can read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and you may also read Habakkuk and they will all tell you the same thing— you cannot be right with God by your attempts to keep the O.T. Law because we are all guilty. That is why there are those animal sacrifices.

So there you have it. If you think you want to try and keep the Law, the Word of God tells you God will never justify you. In fact, you are under a curse.

**Reason #3** - Because any attempt to keep the Law is **contrary** to faith. 3:12

Now look very carefully at this verse—if one thinks he can be right with God by his ability to keep the Law, that person is living life contrary to a belief that only faith in Jesus Christ and God’s grace can save him and that puts the person under a curse.

If you think you are going to be saved by keeping the Law, then you believe something contrary to grace and faith. **The O.T. Law and N.T. grace are **contrary** systems.** You must choose one or the other. You either rely upon yourself or you rely upon Jesus Christ.

Faith and law are two separate systems that are contrary to each other. No one can please God by a law/works system. The system that pleases God is a system of faith. In fact, Hebrews 11:6 says, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

If a person wants to put himself back under the O.T. Law, one must keep all of it all of the time. You will live and die by trying to keep the Law and you will end up not pleasing God, because those who try to live by the Law have rejected the wonderful grace gift of Jesus Christ, and that will leave one condemned.

Let us say that you want to travel to some destination out west. You are trying to decide whether to take an Amtrak train or fly. If you take the Amtrak train, you will travel longer but you will see more. If you fly, you will get there quicker but see less. Now let us say you are discussing this with your travel agent and your travel agent says I think you should do both at the same time. I think you should travel both by train and plane. You would say that is impossible, are you out of your mind? You have to choose because you cannot do both at the same time. One choice is up in the sky and the other choice is down here on earth.

So it is with God and so it is with law and grace. You have to choose because the two systems are contrary to each other. One is heavenly and one is earthly. You must make a choice. If you choose law, you are under a curse; if you choose grace, you are right with God.
THEOLOGICAL POINT #2 – Any person who believes in Jesus Christ is redeemed and promised eternal life. 3:13-18

Somehow the vast majority of people have missed the significance of this point. Jesus Christ died on that cross and He did not do it for Himself or for the fun of it. He could have summoned legions of angels and they would have destroyed His enemies faster than Sodom and Gomorrah. But He died on that cross and there were three stated reasons why right here:

Reason #1 - Jesus Christ died on the cross to redeem us from the curse of the Law. 3:13

Now the curse of the Law is if you break one commandment at any time you are guilty and condemned. Jesus Christ went to that cross to redeem us from that curse. He became a curse for us. He does not hang on that cross for something He did; He is hanging on that cross for what we did; we broke the Law of God.

There are actually three Greek words translated “redeem” and two of the Greek words are from the same family. Paul’s choice here is very theologically significant. Now the word “redeem” is “exagorazo.” Now there are two different agorazo verbs Paul could use.

Verb #1 - Agorazo - you purchase something in the market place and leave it there;
Verb #2 - Exagorazo - you purchase something at the market place and take it out and make it yours.

The specific emphasis of the Greek word “exagorazo” is that you are taken completely out of something. You are purchased and taken completely out of something. Do not miss this.

Now here is the point. We were slaves to the Law and we were under the Law and the Law condemned us and Jesus Christ went to that cross to get us out of the Law and get us into a relationship with God. He went to that cross to take us completely out of the Law, not leave us in the Law. He went to that cross to make us a child of God and get us out from and away from that Law which is the basis for our condemnation.

Now how did He do that? He became a curse for us and He hung on that cross as one cursed by God. Paul says in II Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The real key to seeing Christ as a curse for us is to see our self as a condemned sinner.

Jesus Christ went to that cross to make the payment that gets you out and sets you free from the Law. So if you are trying to keep the Law to be right with God, you are nullifying the work of Jesus Christ, who became a curse for you.
Reason #2 - Jesus Christ died on the cross in order to make it possible for all people to be justified by faith like Abraham. 3:14

Abraham got a direct revelation from God and he simply believed what God said. That is what justifying faith is. Justifying faith does not have to be a strong faith; it has to be a focused faith. It focuses straight on Jesus Christ.

We have direct revelation from God and that direct revelation is Jesus Christ. He came in the flesh and He died on the cross and when we believe on Him we are justified by faith just like Abraham.

The blessing of justification promised to Abraham could not come to the Gentiles by way of that which is physical, because we are not Jewish. The blessing of justification could come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ through faith. We tap into a relationship with God by faith.

Reason #3 - Jesus Christ died on the cross to offer us an unconditional covenant of salvation. 3:15-16

We have contractual agreements in this life. We sign our name to a contract and no one is able to add anything to it or subtract from it. Once the contract is signed, one is locked into the contract and it cannot be altered.

The same is true with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus Christ died on that cross to save us from our sins and once we believe on Jesus Christ for salvation, we cannot add any human works or conditions to the contract.

The promise to Abraham and to his seed is that any who would believe would be justified. This promise of justification was found in one singular “seed” of Abraham–Jesus Christ. It was not found in a bunch of Jewish “seeds,” laws or attempts to keep the Law.

In fact, verses 17-18 make the point clearly. Just because the Law was given 430 years after the promise to Abraham that he was justified by faith does not nullify the contract or the promise.

God is a God who cannot lie. God made a covenant promise that He would enter into a relationship with sinners through faith alone in Christ alone. Just because some religious organization comes along several hundred years later with their laws, does not nullify God’s promise.

Now here is what this all comes down to. You either believe that your faith in Jesus Christ will save you or you believe that your works and law-keeping will save you. This is an either or choice. Which is it?