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The Law v. The Promise

Galatians 3

Prayer: *Father, I just want to thank you and praise you for this day. I thank you and praise you for your word. As little ones are singing how they seek to hide it in their heart, so we, too, need to hide it in our heart. This morning I pray for yet another opportunity to open it up, to ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit so that we can hide it in our own hearts in a deeper and more permanent way, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, the last time, this was two weeks ago we were looking at the book of Galatians and we discovered Paul asking angrily six different questions of the Galatians. And if you recall, Paul starts off the question with a question that clearly illustrates how upset he is. He says in *Galatians 3:1: O foolish galatians! Who has bewitched you?* And just to refresh our memories, Paul is addressing an extraordinarily serious error that has enveloped the Galatian church. They have embraced the error of "the gospel plus." They've insisted that Jesus's death on the cross was absolutely necessary but it was not sufficient for salvation, and

for that they taught in addition what was a flat out lie, they taught that you had to additionally subscribe to all of the Jewish rights and rituals including circumcision.

And so Paul says in his second question, he says: *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?* So Paul is addressing genuine believers here. Only genuine believers in Christ receive the Spirit of Christ and because they are genuine believers, they have to have started out receiving that spirit through faith. That's the only way you can get it and not through works of the law. They had to have started out by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives and thus by faith they had been justified. God had applied the righteousness of Christ to their account and now they stood perfected before God not on the basis of their own righteousness or their performance but on the basis of Christ's. And because they were now made perfect by faith through Christ, they had received God's Holy Spirit who now lived inside them.

So the question is: How could some people who are so incredibly blessed to have their sin debt paid in full by Christ, how could they revert back to a system where righteousness came only by perfectly following a huge set of rules and regulations that no one was capable of following in the first place? I mean, these were

folks who started out simply believing in the gospel and now they're marching wholesale into this slavery of rules and regulations defining their worth and value before God. All this in spite of the fact that God says over and over again, if you go that route, you had better be prepared to be absolutely flawless because perfection alone is going to be the standard by which you will be judged. *Galatians 3:10* says: *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."* God's saying you want to go to heaven by who you are and what you do? Fine. Then you better do it all with absolute perfection because that's what the standard demands. I mean after all God is perfect and he can require nothing less than perfection itself. *Galatians 3:11* says: *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."* So Paul repeats the fact that no one will ever be justified by God by the law because no one outside of Jesus Christ will ever be able to do the law perfectly. Jesus not only lived his life perfectly, he also offered up that perfect life as a substitute for our fallen lives of sin and so we by faith get to claim his righteousness as ours. The only way we can ever stand righteous before God is to simply trust in what God has done. And look what Paul says God has done in *Galatians 3:13*, he says: *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" -- so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. And again, that promised spirit is the Holy Spirit. That's God. It's the third part of the trinity. He's now living inside us as the promised Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ, not when we undertake some series of rules and regulations such as the Judaizers were offering.

You have to understand, Paul realizes what a battle he is in here. This is a fight to the death and so he brings out the big guns. I mean he's dealing primarily with Jewish hearers and so he brings out Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith. And he goes into a great deal of detail comparing the faith that produced righteousness in Abraham with this works gospel that the Judaizers are offering. In our text this morning Paul starts out by comparing the promise that God made to Abraham with the law that the Judaizers were touting. And he points out that this law that the Judaizers are so fond of, that is, that's the very law that God gave on Mt. Sinai to Moses, the Ten Commandments, that law, it didn't come until after Abraham's decision to believe God's promise as the source of his righteousness. This is what he says in *Galatians 3:17*. He says: *And I say this: The law, which came 430 years later, does not revoke a covenant that was previously*

*ratified by God and cancel the promise. So Paul is making the case and he says, the case is this, that a promise accepted centuries earlier, well that still takes precedence over a law established centuries later. Paul starts out by describing God's covenant with Abraham. It was a covenant that was made as a promise accepted. It was a covenant that had no conditions. First you have to understand a little bit as to who this fellow Abraham was. I mean, he was just a man. He was just a guy, a guy that God selected. In fact he was an idol worshiper from Ur of the Chaldees. And so God looks down and he chooses this one individual and he says, I'm going to make a nation out of you and that nation will produce the Messiah, the God man Jesus Christ. And so Abraham is simply going about his idol worshiping ways and God says to him in *Genesis 12*: "Go from your country and from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

Now if you don't think it's a big deal, wait until you're 75 years old, wait until you've already established yourself, wait until

you're on the back end of your life and just kind of up and leave everything and head out into parts unknown, parts unknown that have absolute and imminent dangers simply because God told you to. I mean this faith that Abraham exercised was not merely a belief in a set of principles, it was a costly willingness to act on those convictions. And God says it's that faith, it's not adhering to a set of rules and regulations, it's that faith that made Abraham justified before God. So God goes on to make this promise to Abraham in *Genesis 17*. He says: *"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."* Abraham simply took God at his word. And it is that faith that was accounted to him as righteousness. And so Paul's making an example of Abraham because all his fellow Jews revered Abraham because of his faithfulness to that promise that he was given.

Now you remember -- may remember a few weeks back we did a series called "Now You See Me, Now You Don't," and it was on how God builds faith in his people, and we focused quite a bit on the life of Abraham because his life perfectly illustrated how God builds faith in his children. And so we followed the life of Abraham, we

saw that it was filled with trials and triumphs and successes and failures and everyone of those successes and failures was used by God to grow Abraham in the faith that made him righteous. Well now we find Paul centuries later and he's battling with the offspring of Abraham who have taken that simple trust in the promise of God and added to it layers and layers of regulations. They started with the Ten Commandments that God had given to the Jews on Mt. Sinai and then they added multiple layers of additional manmade rules and regulations, so much so that the original of faith and a promise that Abraham had embraced got lost. It got lost in all those rules and regulations. So Paul starts out trying to explain that the promise that was made was still binding because it preceded the law by centuries. He says: *To give a human example, brothers: Even with a manmade covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. This is what I mean: The law which came 430 years afterward, does not annul the covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.* So what Paul is saying is if I have a legitimate will, if I have a legitimate covenant that's ratified by the equivalence of a court of law, then no one can come by centuries later and try to annul it or try to add something to it. This is exactly what the Judaizers were trying to do. They insisted that a right standing before God came specifically because

of your performance. Obey the rules and do what you are told and you can make yourself pleasing to God. Paul insists that no performance will ever make anyone righteous before God and that faith alone in God's provision is where righteousness comes from. Paul says the law which came 430 years afterwards can't make the original promise that God made to Abraham void. And besides, the law and the promise are two vastly different things. See, the law of Moses was a covenant promise. It was conditional. It was based on performance. God said that he would do his part and the people of Israel would do theirs or so they claimed. In *Exodus 24* it says: *Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."* Well, we know fat chance that they would ever do that. They never did. See, the promise given by God to Abraham was an unconditional promise. He just promised that he would be their God. And the promise is captured by what Paul is trying to say in the statement at the end of the promise in *Genesis 17*. I mean, God says: *"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring, and I will be their God."* This covenant promise between Abraham and his offspring and their God meant that generations later Abraham's offspring would one day give birth to God in the flesh. You see, the blessing, God says you're going to be a blessing to the entire world, the blessing that Abraham was to be to the rest

of the world is that out of his loins would come Jesus the Messiah and Abraham's righteousness came because he believed God, because he believed his promises. *Romans 4:3* says: *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."*

And I've often had this discussion about people who look at the Old Testament, they look at the New Testament and they wonder, say, well, you know, if placing your faith in Jesus's death and resurrection is what makes you righteous before God, well then how do people in the Old Testament become righteous? They had no idea who Jesus was. I mean even though God had promised Abraham that the entire world would be blessed through him, he certainly didn't elaborate to them on how this would take place. I mean Abraham, Moses and David didn't even know Jesus. They never met him. So how did they get saved? Well, the answer is they got saved in the exact same way that we get saved, they placed their faith in God's provision for sin. Now for us that means placing our faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. In their day, God's provision for sin was the sacrificial blood of an animal. It was a sign intentionally designed to look forward to the time when an animal's blood would no longer be representative of the ultimate sacrifice, because the ultimate sacrifice Jesus Christ would be shedding his own blood on the cross. But either way, Old Testament

or New Testament, we are saved the same way, we are saved by faith in God's provision for sin and not by adherence to the law.

So Paul next then addresses the obvious question, he says in verse 19, he says: *Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come.* I mean why then the law? It's a great question. Because if faith alone in Christ alone saves us, I mean then why even bring in this whole series of rules and regulations that came out of the law that God gave on Mt. Sinai 430 years after the promise he gave to Abraham? I mean why in the world would God introduce such a complicating provision, one that certainly could present an awful lot of grief, mischief and heartache? I mean here you have the Judaizers, they're using the law itself as a means of introducing a false gospel to the Galatians. Why not simply stick with the promise instead of the law in the first place? Well, let me first give you the principles and then we'll get down to the specifics.

The principle is this: The law is a gift. The law is a gift from God. And like any good gift, it can be used for great profit or it can be abused for great harm. And there are three general reasons why God gave us the law. God gave us the law as a mirror, as a curb, and as a guide. So first look at the law, let's look at the law as a mirror, that is it reflects back to us exactly who we are

in the eyes of the only one who ultimately matters and that is God. Now I've often used the analogy that the law's like one of those signs you see at amusement park rides, those signs, you know, that little ones come up and the sign says, "You must be this tall to ride on this ride." Well when you go up to the sign, it tells you either that you are tall enough, that is you are qualified or you're not tall enough, which is to say you are unqualified to go on the ride. It acts as a mirror reflecting whether or not you are qualified as a rider. Well, that sign, just like the law, just like a mirror, that sign has no power within it other than to disqualify you. I mean if you're this tall and the sign says you must be this tall, has no power to make you an inch taller if you're too short. It can only tell you that you're not tall enough, that you are not qualified. Well, the law of God is a sign, it's a mirror, and it shows and it demands absolute transcended flawlessness in any human being as a qualifier for heaven and so it disqualifies virtually every single one of us. The problem is the vast majority of people live today without the mirror of the law. Well, actually they do have a mirror of sorts. What they're looking through is the equivalent of a carnival mirror which basically reflects back what they want to see. And what it says is if I'm relatively good, if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then I'm pretty much okay with God. And God's law says differently. It says: *For all who rely on the 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." So without the mirror of the law, we never even realize how disqualified we are.

Secondly, the law is useful as a curb. It prevents the animal that is inside each of us from coming to the fore. *Proverbs 29* says: *Without revelation people run wild, but one who listens to instruction will be happy.* We've seen it happen in this country, I mean, I remember the Newark riots, I remember the Los Angeles riots, and when that happened in that area people just forsook the law. They took the law in their own hands, they made up their own laws and they began acting like animals. You take your life in your hands if you're caught there. I mean in Hitler's Germany, the curb of the law disappeared so thoroughly that people actually felt comfortable making other people into soap and lamp shades. And we see that today with ISIS. What is so terrifying in groups like ISIS is that there's no curb of any law whatsoever including the Koran. These people just make it up as they go. And so in their view now raping children and crucifying teenagers becomes more and more acceptable. You see the law is a curb or a fence that keeps us within the boundaries of sanity and out of the boundless insanity that exists in the territory of lawlessness.

And thirdly, the law is a guideline. It shows you the direction you should be headed in. The Bible is basically an operation manual for homo sapiens. The designer of human beings authored a book that if followed will produce the best possible outcome if it's followed as a guide. The fact is, if a complete atheist were to follow the law of God, he would still lead the best possible life on earth that he could. I mean even if he or she virtually ignored the first four commandments, the God-oriented commandments, he would still understand that honoring your parents and not committing murder or adultery or stealing or lying along with an absence of coveting still makes for a life well-lived, and that loving your neighbor as yourself is simply a good practice for a good life. So the generic answer to Paul's question in verse 19, why the law, is why the law is a gift is that it's a mirror, it is a curb and it is a guide. But Paul takes it even further. You see, the Galatian Judaizers had taken and abused this gift of the law, shaping it and molding it into a weapon that they could use to enslave their fellow Jews. Paul had the difficult task of explaining why the law, which he clearly sees being used badly here, he has to explain why it's also a source of great blessing. Paul's not about to throw the baby out with the bath water. He hates this abuse of the law but he loves what the law can provide. And so he answers the question why then the law by explaining to the Galatians the specific reason why. Paul says the law was added

because of transgressions. That's an easy part to understand. Let me just explain. Paul is talking here about using the law as a mirror. You see, ever since the fall of Adam we were all born with what we all know is our sin nature. Ephesians 2 goes into it, explains it, says: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* What God is saying is that every single person in this room was born and is by nature a child of wrath. And what that means is that we all of us have within us a bent towards sin. It's there attitudinally from birth. And having had lots of kids, I was always struck with amazement at people who thought that mankind was naturally good and that it was the environment that somehow or other shaped good or bad into a child. And I would tell those folks that I never, never had to sit my kids down and teach them how to lie to or pinch or trip or bite their fellow brothers and sisters. Every single one of them came about that naturally. I mean it was all in there from birth. And the job of any parent is to train a child away from his natural inclinations, away from the fallenness that all of us are born with. And the theological reason for that is simple, I mean, we are all born sons of Adam

with this predilection towards sin. And that means that sin is always sitting in our hearts and it sits there all the time as an attitude. And the reason why law adds transgression is because it forces those attitudes into actions, into what I should say are actionable actions. And Paul made that clear. Let me explain. This *Romans 7:7*. Paul says: *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.* Paul is saying I never, never had the slightest problem with coveting until I learned, oh, you're not allowed to do that? You're not allowed to covet? And as soon as I learned that, that sin attitude that was lying attitudinally inside my heart, it leapt into action and it produced in me a coveting such as I'd never even known before. God says in *Romans 4:15*: *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* What God is saying here is that sin, that is a sin attitude, is enough to make you an enemy of God but it is not visible, it's not palpable enough to constitute a transgression and for that you need a law. I mean, all God has to do is make a law and our rebelliousness within instantly makes us want to disobey it. Make

a law saying coveting is forbidden and suddenly even Paul finds himself coveting like crazy. But there's also a point that God is using here that applies to 21st century law. And what he's saying here is where there is no law, there is no transgression. If God didn't give us a codified law, there would be no way of saying where we broke it.

There's a horrifying case that's going to the Courts right now in which a young woman is accused of manslaughter and she just might actually walk free. This is from *CNN*. "Almost three years ago, Massachusetts teenager Conrad Roy III was found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning in his pickup truck in a Kmart parking lot. His girlfriend posted grieving messages on social media and raised money in his name for mental health awareness. His friends and family lamented a young life cut short by suicide. But before long prosecutors came up with another, more sinister, theory about what happened. And within months they indicted the girlfriend, saying that they had discovered numerous text messages from her, urging Roy to kill himself. Michelle Carter, who was 17 at the time, goes on trial this week in a Taunton, Massachusetts, courtroom on involuntary manslaughter charges. She waived her right to a jury trial Monday, meaning her case will be decided by a judge who will hear testimony and render a verdict. Boston defense attorney Peter Elikann told *CNN* affiliate *WFXT* that lawyers and legal scholars are

watching the case closely because it could set a legal precedent.

'At the moment, there's really no law on the books in Massachusetts about whether somebody can encourage somebody to commit suicide or not.'

There's a very good chance this woman is going to go free, and it's based simply on what God is saying here, without a law, there's no transgression. Paul goes on to say: *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. If you understand what I just said, you are a genius. This is Paul at his thickest. But even before we go there, I want to give you a warning about some of Paul's writings. Sometimes they're just plain hard to understand and that's not just my opinion, it's the opinion of the apostle Peter as well. He said this in 2 Peter 3, he said: Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand.*

So Peter's not excusing, he's not complaining about Paul, he's simply stating a fact. And sometimes Paul gets a little wordy and sometimes his reasoning requires genuine effort to follow. I should point out that he was only trying to get our tiny little human minds to grasp some aspect of the mind of God which is like trying to get a monkey to understand how to work a laptop. If you understand Paul's passage right off the bat, my hat goes off to you because I to read it five or six times, I said what are you talking about? Let me repeat it. It says: *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels about by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.*

Well this much we know. First the offspring to whom the promise has been made is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that the law was put into place through Moses who was up on Mt. Sinai acting as our intermediary and that he received the law written on tablets which had been delivered by angels. Now we know very little about how that happened but we do know that there are other statements in scripture that seem to corroborate that. Stephen in Acts 7 said this: *"Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who*

received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." And even Hebrews, Hebrews 2 says: *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it, for since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution.* Okay. So we know that Moses was the intermediary who stood between God on Mt. Sinai and the people on the ground who were terrified, and we know that he was one of many intermediaries who were priests who stood between God and man until the ultimate intermediary came about who was of course Jesus Christ. And then Paul goes on to finish up the argument between the promise made to Abraham and the law the Judaizers were touting, and he points at what the primary purpose of the law actually was: It was designed to make us despair of ever being righteous enough through law keeping. He says: *Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would certainly be by the law.* In other words, if the law was an amusement park sign that could actually give you the two or three inches that you needed to qualify for the ride, then you might feel confident that the law can make you righteous. But it can't give you those necessary inches. It can only tell you you don't have them. Again, verse 22: *But the Scripture has imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Before*

this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed.

I think you may remember, I used to talk about my Jewish friend Harry and he used to tell me all the time how confident he was that he could stand before God because his efforts to obey the Ten Commandments were as good as anybody's that he knew. And time and again I would point out to him the law was not given to show him how good he was compared to somebody else. I said that the law was given to show him that compared to perfection he had failed and that scripture had imprisoned him all around insisting that the more truth -- being more truthful than your neighbor is something, in actuality it's nothing. And each detail of the law formed a wall of that prison. And that one single lie or even a half truth disqualified him from heaven. And it did so because God demands of us the very same perfection that is his by nature. The lie was just part of the prison wall. And claiming that you never stole a dime from anyone was meaningless as well, I mean, if you've ever coveted anything your neighbor's ever had or even looked for a moment lustfully at a member of the opposite sex, you are disqualified. I mean the law was a prison wall and it mirrored our imperfection relentlessly. None of us feel the need to brag about the fact that we haven't murdered anybody but then Christ comes along, he says I got news for you, being angry with somebody is the

equivalent of murder. He says: "You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Fool!" will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire." To make matters worse, in 1 John it says: Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. The standard makes our ability to be righteous nil.

Most of us have been transfixed this past week by the testimony of James Comey at the Senate subcommittee hearing. What struck me about the scrutiny that Mr. Comey received was that it was only a couple of levels higher than the standard that we judge ourselves by. I'm sure Mr. Comey considers himself to be at the very least an upright citizen, I mean, after all, he was the head of the FBI. But by the time his testimony was over, there were myriads of people who were describing him as an angry, bitter, lying coward. It's all because the standard that they applied to Mr. Comey was now a couple of steps higher.

What do you think the standard is going to be that's applied to us? See, the whole point of the law says Paul is to surround and imprison us with a standard that we couldn't possibly meet. And if

God were to leave things right there, he would still be just and right and holy, condemning every single one of us. In fact if God were to take every single one of us fallen human beings and cast all of us out of his presence forever, the universe would still shout, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord GOD Almighty!" But that's not what God elected to do. And for reasons known to God and God alone, God chose to do beyond what we could ever imagine. He chose to leave heaven itself and come to earth not as a king or a person of honor but as a servant. Philippians says: *He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* And Isaiah tells us: *He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

I spoke last week about Christ's redemptive glory, that's that particular type of glory that God was putting on display, his character and his attributes demonstrated through his Son. Well, God is showing us here through the mercy of the cross who he is and what he does, and it's a story that still grips the entire universe. You know, the apostle Peter tells us that angels long to look into the gospel of grace. They are transfixed by God's character, a character that would take him from the glories of

heaven itself to the agony and shame of being stripped naked and nailed to a cross, suspended in midair, rejected by earth and rejected by heaven itself. I mean the scripture is very clear in declaring that Jesus despised the shame of the cross but it's also very clear in stating that the joy of ransoming and rescuing us and thereby glorifying his Father made Jesus say it was worth it, that it was in fact a joy. And it all started with a promise. It was made first to the serpent in the Garden of Eden in *Genesis 3:15*. God says: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."* Jesus would take on the serpent. Well, that promise was followed by a promise to Abraham. He said: *"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Jesus would take on flesh through Abraham's seed. And Jesus had fulfilled the promise, he had come to earth, he had lived a perfect life and then he had offered up that life on the cross. He had ransomed and rescued his sheep and that included his former persecutor Paul who's writing this letter. And now Paul is more determined than ever to take on the Judaizers to not let that promise of righteousness that comes through faith be co-opted by those who would steal that promise and replace it with the law. So Paul concludes in *Galatians 3:24*: *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a*

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

So some final questions from Paul. Says first, are you justified by faith? Are you a child of God by faith? Have you put your faith in Christ? Is Christ and his kingdom what you orient your entire life around? Well if so, you are officially the offspring of Abraham, an heir of Christ not because of your performance but because of his promise. *For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you. We thank you for the incredible gift that you have given, for the gift that comes simply by trusting in you. The more we recognize that all around us are temptations to leave that, to be bewitched by what the enemy is offering us. We see it in the Galatian church, we see it in the church around us today. There are myriad temptations to leave the simple faith that produces righteousness and enter into all kinds of ways that we attempt to earn your pleasure and to become righteous before you.

Lord, give us the wisdom and the insight and the knowledge to realize that it was you and you alone who gives us this righteousness. And we praise you and thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.