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Galatians

But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Galatians 3:11

Paul has just shown that the law brings a curse, meaning. In order for the Galatians to understand this, he says, "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident." The words, "...in the sight of God" are given as if we are already standing before God in judgment. In our trial, our life is being evaluated. What deeds of the law can justify us? The answer is, "None."

But how can this be? The law was given by God. So how can it be that we cannot stand justified before Him by observing the law? The answer comes from the words of Habakkuk who lived under the law and wrote his words under divine inspiration. In his words he said, "...the just shall live by faith." Within the law itself, was a requirement which necessitated faith in order to have one's sins atoned for, the Day of Atonement. If faith was required for this to occur, then it showed that observance of the law had failed to justify anyone over the previous year. This went on, year after year, for the entire time of the law.

What Habakkuk (and later Paul) explains is that it is impossible for the law to justify anyone because there was already a way of being justified by God, which is through faith. This was seen in Abraham and it was seen each year on the Day of Atonement. As there cannot be two means of obtaining justification, and the law is not that means, then it must be faith alone which justifies. No other means can come in and replace what has been established by precedent.

In this verse, stress is placed on the word "faith." Because of this, it needs to be determined if this is active or passive faith. If passive, then it is speaking of trusting God; taking Him at his word. If it is active faith, then it would mean "living faithfully." What Paul is speaking of is the passive faith of trust. This is what Abraham was credited for. This is what atoned for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement, and it is what justifies us now. We believe God's word and He imputes to us His righteousness. After this, we can then demonstrate active faith through living faithfully, but our failure to do so will not negate His imputation of righteousness to us.

David found this out several times. His failure to live faithfully did not negate his standing before God because of his simple trust in God's mercy and grace.

Life application: All things come from God. The only thing that we can give Him which can be credited to our account for righteousness is to believe. When we do this simple thing, taking Him at His word, we stand justified before Him. From that point on, we can then add in praise, worship, and faithful conduct as a means of pleasing Him, but we must first demonstrate that we believe His word before those other things can find their proper place.

Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

Galatians 3:12

Paul's last words were that "no one is justified by the law in the sight of God." The obvious question then would be, "How can one be justified in God's sight?" The answer is that "the just shall live by faith." In order to show that this is true, he reached into the writings under the law itself and cited Habakkuk 2:4. Now, building on that, he begins with "Yet..."

This is a contrast to what is proper then, and that contrast is that "the law is not of faith." In order to demonstrate that this is also true, he returns again to the law and cites Leviticus 18:5. If a person needs to "do" something under the law in order to live by that law, then faith is excluded. Doing a deed demonstrates an

attempt to be justified by that deed. Thus, faith is excluded. Faith implies that one is not trusting in one's own deeds.

Further, in order to be justified by the law then, as long as the man lives he would need to continue to do the things of the law. At no time could he stop doing those things and be considered just. As Albert Barnes notes, the law "requires unwavering and perpetual obedience." Faith is entirely excluded from this type of life.

In the previous verse, the stress was upon the word "faith." Now it rests upon the word "does." The two are mutually exclusive. One can either have faith in Christ's work in order to please God, or one can do deeds of the law in order to please Him. Paul's words are a petition for the Galatians to think through the avenue they have taken.

Will they now introduce the Law of Moses when they had already exercised faith? If so, then Christ's work in fulfillment of the law is set aside. In doing this, then they would have to fulfill the law perfectly with that "unwavering and perpetual obedience" mentioned above. It is a self-condemning act.

Life application: Ephesians 1:13 & 14 says that you receive the Holy Spirit when you believe in the gospel message of Christ. Paul has now shown that continuing in that faith is how the just person shall live. He has also now shown that pursuing the law is not of faith. Stand fast on the grace of Christ and do not be suckered into believing that you must observe some or all of the tenets of the law in order to be pleasing to God. In so doing, you actually become displeasing to Him. You have forsaken the work of His Son and gone about seeking your own righteousness.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree"), Galatians 3:13

In verse 10, Paul said that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." He then went on to explain to us that that if the precepts of the law are not met by anyone under the law (and which no one can meet) that they are under a curse. Now to show the marvel of Christ, he says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law." If the law brought a curse, and if Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, then it must mean that the law is annulled through Christ's work (as it is explicitly said to be in numerous NT passages).

Paul is obviously speaking of the Jews who were under the law, but his words are given to include the Gentiles in Galatia (and thus us!) who would stupidly presume to insert the law into our lives when it is fulfilled in Christ. Ellicott notes that, "The opening of this verse without any connecting particle lends sharpness and emphasis to the contrast. The Law brought a curse. There it stopped short. That was all it could do. The first thing that Christianity does is to undo this result of the Law by deliverance from the curse."

Where the law failed, Christ prevailed over it and "redeemed us from the curse." The word redeemed here means "to purchase, to buy up." From that it gives the sense of "to purchase anyone, to redeem, to set free." Paul is saying that it is through the work of Christ that we have been "purchased" and thus "set free" from the law (which brings a curse). So why would anyone attempt to reinsert (or to insert in the case of the Gentiles) that from which a purchase of redemption has been made, and which could only bring a curse?

Next, to show us how Christ did this thing on our behalf, he says that it is through Christ "having become a curse for us." This was explained in Galatians 2:20. Christ became a curse under the law by becoming legally impure because, as Paul now cites from Deuteronomy 21:23, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree."

Here Paul cites the substance of the Greek translation of the OT passage, but he notably leaves off the words "by God" after "cursed." Paul knew that Christ was not cursed by God when He was crucified. The law deemed Christ, as it were, as accursed by having subjected Him to the type of death that a scoundrel would die. He died in fulfillment of the law, and in His death the law then cast Him out of its

legal constraints by the type of death He died. Thus, when we join to Him, we also are also cast out of the legal constraints of the law. The law has no power over us because of this.

The word for tree here, *xulon*, means "anything made of wood, a piece of wood, a club, staff; the trunk of a tree, used to support the cross-bar of a cross in crucifixion" (Strong's). If a tree is that which gives life, and this is certainly what was on Paul's mind, then as Ignatius notes, "Christ was nailed up for our sakes - of which fruit are we. That is, the cross is regarded as a tree, and Christians as its fruit" (Vincent's Word Studies).

The symbolism is extremely rich and it points back to the very fall of man where this was written in Genesis 3 -

"So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3:24

It is Christ who is the life and it is Christ who restores to us access to eternal life through His cross. It is the most amazing thing for us to consider. That hope in life which was lost is now again available through the death of Christ.

Life application: All who attempt to be justified by works of the law are under a curse. Those who claim to be "in Christ" and yet mandate works of the law are both heretics and under a curse. Keep far away from such depraved people.

...that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:14

In this verse, Paul uses the word "that," or *ina*, twice. The first speaks in response to verse 13 -

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."

As this is so, then the law is fulfilled and annulled through Him. He has done away with all the precepts which it held, and He has broken down its limitations, meaning its exclusive nature as belonging to the nation of Israel alone. In so doing, "the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus."

The exclusivity of Israel's inheritance is gone. The door has been opened for the promises to Abraham to be lavished upon all nations through mere faith in the finished work of Christ. However, there is still an exclusive nature to this blessing. It is not granted automatically to all people. Rather, it is only for those who are "in Christ Jesus." One must demonstrate faith in what God has done through Christ in order to be included in the blessings of Abraham.

After stating this, Paul then uses the word "that," or *ina*, again. This is used next in sequence after the first instance. Not only has there been redemption from the curse of the law through Christ, but because of that there is the allowance that "we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Note the pronoun: "We." Paul is a Jew, but he is writing to the Gentiles about a matter which concerns them. In his words, he shows that the same promise is given to both Jew and Gentile in exactly the same way. Release from the mandates of the law, and the granting of the Spirit, both come through Christ's work. Further, they come upon all who simply believe!

The "promise of the Spirit" was prophesied in the Old Testament in passages such as Joel 2:28, 29. In fact, that passage was cited by Peter in Acts 2:16-31 to show that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was a fulfillment of that passage.

It should be noted that with the promise being fulfilled now in both Jew and Gentile in a demonstrable way, and which is then recorded in the Bible, an outward demonstration of the Spirit is no longer necessary. Paul shows in

Ephesians 1:13, 14 that when a person believes in Christ, they are sealed with the Spirit as a guarantee of their salvation. Instead of an outward demonstration - "sight," we are now to believe that the Spirit has been given - "faith." The modern charismatic movement which claims one must have an outward demonstration of tongues is not only nonsense, it is also contrary to the idea of living by faith.

Life application: The law is ended; the time of the giving of the Spirit has come; and this is offered to any and all who will receive the work of Christ by mere faith.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Galatians 3:15

Paul now wisely proclaims a truth which was understood among humanity in general. When a covenant was made, it became a binding agreement between parties. One party could not arbitrarily add to it, detract portions of it, or call it void. Once it was in effect, it stood as a permanent and unchangeable agreement concerning what had transpired.

In the case of the covenant that was made with Abraham, the Lord's words implied that they were speaking of the coming Messiah. The terminology could mean nothing else. Four hundred and thirty years later, the Law of Moses was brought into the picture as Israel agreed to its terms at the foot of Sinai.

However, what came about in that law could in no way be added to, or annul, what transpired between the Lord and Abraham. In fact, the law was based on works whereas the promise granted righteousness by faith. Works and faith are mutually exclusive principles. Therefore, both in the fact that the covenant with Abraham preceded the law, and the fact that these agreements were based on conflicting tenets, the law could in no way be an avenue to a declaration of righteousness.

Understanding this, he says, "Brethren." The word is given to highlight the fact that they, Gentiles in the flesh, were brethren to him, a Jew who was born and raised under the law. "I speak in the manner of men" is given in accordance with the example mentioned above which was the universally understood nature of covenants.

Concerning such a covenant, he says, "Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it." If this is true with a covenant between men, how much more certain is such a covenant when made by the Lord! Further, after declaring Abraham righteous by faith alone, the covenant which was made with him was one-sided. Only the Lord passed through the divided animals. The entire passage shows that what was promised and the covenant that was cut was based solely on the faith of Abraham and the unchangeable nature of God, who cannot lie.

Life application: The law cannot nullify what was already in effect concerning the promise to Abraham. Therefore, the law was given for a different purpose. When it had served its usefulness, it was set aside in the giving of the New Covenant, a covenant based on grace. If you are under grace, then you cannot be under the law. The two are mutually exclusive.