



Galatians 3:1-29

The Gospel of Abraham

Leviticus 18: 1-5, Galatians 3:1-29

Introduction: “You Flaming Idiots!”

To use some good Australian vernacular.

It is in that vein that Paul begins this section of his letter to the Galatians. (Galatians Chapter 3)

He wants their attention! He needs to address a problem in their Christian lives and that is what we turn our attention to this morning, as it is a problem that afflicts most Christian lives.

Tim Keller tells this story: ... The Great Blondin, the acrobat tightrope walker walked across Niagara Falls on a wire. Then he took a wheelbarrow with a person size load across. Then he would ask the crowd “do you believe I can do it with a person in the wheelbarrow?” The usual story is that no one would take it up: they did not that much faith in Blondin. But ... Suppose someone does and then halfway across decides this looks easy ...and says “I will get out and walk myself from here”. This is the sort of things that Paul sees the Galatian Christians doing.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel...” (Galatians 1:6) Again, strong words. The Galatians are turning from the truth. Paul, from that stage on, through to the end of chapter 2, turns to asserting the basis of his authority to speak to them bluntly – He is an Apostle, sent by Jesus himself. And the basis of His Gospel he says: ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2)***

The Gospel of grace through faith is Jesus Christ.

Evidently there were those coming to the Galatians that called to them to 'complete' their Christian conversion by taking up and following the Jewish law – notably circumcision. Paul reinforces through his own life and work, how this addition is NOT required by Gentile Christians. They are saved by grace through faith in Jesus and that alone. Nothing needs to be added to it. So, let's turn back to the passage

The Problem

1 You foolish Galatians! Paul abandons subtlety. John Phillips (commentary) – “O you dear idiots of Galatia.” You stupid Galatians. Paul's strong words are because of what is happening: this is not a mere difference of opinion, nor some theological nicety; this is a matter of Life and Death.

He begins his argument with the first of a number of questions.

Who has bewitched you? Is it some sort of spell?? Are they under some sort of spell or are they deceived demonically? For behind all such deception is Satan himself.

Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. They had had the gospel spoken clearly to them... They had 'seen' Christ in the clear communication of the Gospel. The idea is that he has been 'placarded' before them. We all saw our political candidates for the recent election, placarded before us ... everywhere. The Galatians had been 'given' Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

So a second question: **² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the**

flesh? ⁴ Have you experienced so much in vain, if it really was in vain?

Did they 'earn' the Spirit? Clearly Paul implies 'NO'. So why go backwards? For them to now (to us), to rely on their own strength, their bodily, fleshly, strength; is all the basis of their belief in vain? The issue for the Galatians, and for us, is how do I go on in my Christian life?

I am saved by faith; how do I now live as Jesus' person?

⁵ So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

A third question: Paul is asking; is what is happening in your life then and now, a result of the Spirit's work or your own work?

So now another argument. Look back at the roots of God's saving work in the world.

The example: **⁶ So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15: 6.** So back to the Old Testament. In Genesis 15, God reiterates his promise from Genesis 12 to Abraham and pledges Himself to it in the ceremony depicted, as walking between the cut halves of animals. And Abraham trust God; no requirements on Abram, God commits himself to his promise.

⁷Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ 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." ⁹So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Abraham is the father of all who are blessed by God. And trust in the promises: Remember the promises, Land, People, and BLESSING – to all the people on earth.

The promise, the pledge of God, is to those who believe. No demands on Abraham; just God's gracious loving choice.

The Choice

¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." We know well that if we rely on the Law; we fail.

Because we can't do everything God requires of us. Deep down we ALL know this ... we are all condemned.

¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will 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 hung on a pole." ¹⁴ 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.

We can't do it: but Jesus could: he lived a perfect, sinless, life. He became our curse – that's my curse and your curse as he died on the cross – not for himself but for us. So we, Gentiles come into the blessing given to Abraham. We receive the promise of the Spirit.

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters let me take an example from everyday 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. ¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷What 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.

¹⁸For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Paul posits another example

Human agreements, contracts, a will cannot be changed. In the same way, God will not break his covenant. All focused first and foremost in Jesus, Himself. The Law, including circumcision, is a later thing. It does not negate the promise, but the promise preceded and overarches the law.

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. ²¹ 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. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

So what use is the Law? It teaches us the need for Jesus. Under the law we are imprisoned by sin in one sense and schooled (guardian can mean schoolmaster (tutor)). So the law was to guard us against our natural orientation to sin. And it was to teach us that we needed something else.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So, in Christ all the barriers are removed: No second-class, second-best, Christians!

So, when we trust in Jesus we are grafted into the true Israel; those who enter into God's promises.

And so Heirs!!!

Conclusion

So we need to think all of this through for our own lives.

Martin Luther: There are three ways in which the Law may be abused. First, those who fancy that they can be justified by the Law. Secondly, those who claim that Christian liberty exempts a Christian from the observance of the Law. Thirdly, there are those who do not understand that the Law is meant to drive us to Christ.

So, let's look at these one at a time.

But first consider a parable of Jesus: Luke 18: Pharisee and Tax Collector

Luke 18: 9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people; robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

We need to consistently and constantly have the attitude of this tax collector.

Cry for God's mercy and rest on his grace and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

First, those who fancy that they can be justified by the Law.

For anyone here who believes that in coming to church, in doing good works, being kind and nice and not murdering, stealing, or lying. Not committing adultery etc. will mean that God will/has to accept them. The message of this passage is clear. – You too are foolish – You cannot ‘keep the law’ completely and you remain under God’s judgement. You cannot be ‘good enough’. You need to realise that you need God’s gracious gift of forgiveness and reconciliation – you are a sinner and cast yourself before Jesus.

That is vital. Then we move to the Christian who has placed their trust in Jesus but now struggles to live the Christian life as the Bible encourages us to do.

This is a difficult road to walk. – It is a path along a narrow ridge. You can fall down one side or the other.

Secondly, those who claim that Christian liberty exempts a Christian from the observance of the Law.

You can say “well I’m saved by Jesus’ grace – so I can do what I like – God will forgive me’ NO! NO! NO!

We are saved to be like Jesus – to live as God wants us to. As the later chapters of this very letter will also encourage us. *“These,” says Peter, “use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness,” and bring the name and the Gospel of Christ into ill repute. Thirdly, there are those who do not understand that the Law is meant to drive us to Christ.*

When the Law is properly used its value cannot be too highly appraised. It will take me to Christ every time. This, I suspect, is the situation in which most of us find ourselves. And the other side of the narrow ridge – which here is the Galatians’ problem. They are trying to add something to their salvation – in this case keeping the Jewish law; in our case trying to be good. But that is not the way either. We begin by grace – and we go on by grace.

We looked at Ephesians 2 earlier but now we add v10

Ephesians 2:⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith

—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We are to ‘do good works’ – but even they are prepared by God for us. So how do we look at this?

What is the antidote to this precipitous fall from the path?

It is to look to Jesus.

Then look to Jesus,

Then look to Jesus some more.

Martin Luther: We comfort the afflicted sinner in this manner:

Brother, you can never be perfect in this life, but you can be holy. He will say: “How can I be holy when I feel my sins?” I answer: You feel sin? That is a good sign. To realize that one is ill is a step, and a very necessary step, toward recovery. “But how will I get rid of my sin?” he will ask. I answer: See the heavenly Physician, Christ, who heals the broken-hearted. Believe in Christ and your sins will be pardoned. His righteousness will become your righteousness, and your sins will become His sins.

Our lives for God are lives of grateful thanks for what he HAS done for; there is nothing we need to strive to achieve, so there is no self-righteousness; there is only loving service.

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