

*So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
For all those 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."
Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous man shall live by faith."
But the law is not of faith but rather "The one who does them shall live by them."
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 the blessing of Abraham
might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

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

For if the inheritance comes by law, it no longer comes by promise, but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

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 the 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.

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:9-22

"Is the Law Contrary to the Promises of God?"

Deacon Chair, Jason Justinger

Last week, we heard Paul teach that *"Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."* We heard that Abraham, himself uncircumcised, was "counted" as righteous by God, simply because he "believed" God's promise that he and Sarah would have children and that: *"all the nations shall be blessed"* by one of their offspring. We also got to hear, what I'd argue is the Scriptural reference for what we here at First Church call the Beckett Panfil Principle in Galatians 3, verse 2: *"Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law?"* Nooo! And today Paul will continue to make his case.

Let's get right to it. In verse 10, Paul goes on to teach us *"Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."* Paul is doing one of my favorite things here. He's quoting Old Testament Scripture to formulate his argument, and this time he's quoting Moses in Deuteronomy. But what is the apostle actually talking about? Paul is teaching us here that the Law can only condemn, it cannot save. Think of it this way. We're all great citizens. Right?

We all follow the law of the land, and many of us have done that successfully for decades. But violate that law once, and God forbid, someone is injured, or worse, someone dies because you broke the law. You're going to jail. And all of those decades of service, those decades of following the rules, of abiding, and living, and dwelling within the law, all that good work will not save you. How many of you have been walking, or on a boat, or in a car, or a motorcycle, when all of a sudden... Ugh! I just ate a bug?

The Pharisees in Jesus' day would strain their tea to ensure that a fruit fly didn't accidentally fall in causing them to consume something non-kosher. Something accidental! But to the Pharisees an unintentional violation of the Law is still a violation of the Law. It's unclean! Get hit by a bus or, in those days, an ox cart before you can make your atoning sacrifice, and you're done. Last week, Paul reminded the Galatians, and us, that you do not have to rely on the Law for salvation. Today, he's telling us you don't even want to.

He continues in verses 11 and 12, *"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."* Again, more Old Testament Scripture from Paul. This time he quotes the prophet Habakkuk about faith and Leviticus about keeping the Law. That Habakkuk quote may sound familiar. It's quoted in 3 New Testament epistles, Romans, Hebrews, and here in Galatians, but let me read that Leviticus reference for you. 18:5 *"You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."*

If you "keep the statutes," Moses warned us, you shall "live." But centuries later the prophet Habakkuk promised that if you have faith, if you believe, you shall "live." The point being that the "faith" that brings us alive to God is what makes obedience to God's commands possible. In other words, we don't need to rely on the Law for our salvation. We don't really want to, and Paul goes on to teach us that nobody ever has been able to. So now what? Paul teaches us the "who, how, and why" in verse 13 *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law."* Here the word "redeemed" in the Greek is the word they use for "to buy, to pay a ransom, to rescue." In other words, Jesus bought our salvation with his life. In 1st John 2, we read that Christ is *"the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*

Propitiation. It's a big fancy word that means debt paid in full. Actually, it means more than that. Our debt is paid in full and completely stricken from the record as if it never existed. How? How did Jesus do this for us? Paul teaches us in verse 13 "by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." Becoming a curse. This was a strange turn of phrase to me.

The Greek word here is "katara," and according to Strong's Concordance the word katara expresses "cursing; a curse... a doomed one." So Jesus became a doomed one. He took our curse, He took all of God's wrath for our disobedience, and paid for that on the cross. And why would He do this? Verse 14 continues and gives us one of the many reasons. "...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

Remember that God not only promised Abraham children, but God also promised the old man that through his offspring "all the nations would be blessed." So Paul goes on to explain that the Law Moses taught from Mt. Sinai in no way changed the promises that God had already made with Abraham hundreds of years before. Last week, Pastor Steve told you the story of how Abraham prayed in his tent for the child God had promised the old man and Sarah. And we learned that God had pulled Abraham out of his tent and showed him the night sky and promised the old man as many children as there were stars to count that night.

But you didn't hear the rest of the story, that the next day God had commanded Abraham to slaughter a number of animals from his flock and to lay their bodies on either side of a walkway where two people could walk. It seems like a bizarre activity to us, but back in those days it was the way an emperor would make a treaty with a king he wanted to rule. The two would walk between the bloody animals making promises to each other and the blood soaked bodies would lay there to warn them both about what might happen to a promise breaker.

A Covenant in the ancient world was an agreement between two or more parties, usually kings. They were like notarized binding contracts that were literally sealed with blood. In the Bible, when we read to "make a covenant" the Hebrew words are typically *kārat berit* which more literally translated means to "cut a covenant." We still talk today about "cutting a deal."

My military friends have all been "cut orders" at some point. I participated in the wedding of my brother a few months back, and, after all, a marriage is a covenant between a man, a woman, and God. So it was not lost on me this tradition of the bride and groom walking into the wedding hall, hand in hand, to the cutting of the cake. So it follows that at sundown on the day Abraham had done all that cutting, God appeared, but he did not make Abraham walk with him on the blood soaked parade ground.

Because this was a one-way covenant. That evening, in Genesis 15, God was making all the promises and it was God himself who would bear all the consequences if either party failed to keep the covenant. So the promise God made Abraham that in his "offspring all the nations would be blessed" obligated God himself to pay the price for our failure to keep God's Word. 430 years later, God would call Moses to liberate Abraham's uncountable descendants from Egyptian slavery and bring them to Mt. Sinai to cut a different kind of covenant than the one-way deal God had promised Abraham. Moses came down the mountain with two tablets in his hands, one copy for God and the other copy for Israel to keep and live, or to break and be cursed.

Paul warned the Galatians and us that "...the law is not of faith, rather, the one who does them shall live by them." "Cursed is everyone," Moses warned old Israel, "who does not abide by all the things written in Book of the Law and do them." But the good news, Paul wants us to know, is that the two-way covenant imposed on Israel at Sinai "does not annul" the one-way deal God had already made with Abraham, "so as to make the promise void." It had always been possible for people to gain forgiveness from God simply by believing the promises God made in their era, and it was still possible in old Israel.

Which begs the obvious question, so Paul asks it, "Why then the Law?" Why impose a two-way covenant on people like Moses and Aaron and David and Solomon when human sin puts obedience to God's law beyond all of us? And the answer Paul tells us: "It, [the Law], was added because of transgressions until the offspring should come to whom the promise was made." More than 400 years after Abraham believed a promise and was saved, more than 1400 years before Christ would come and pay for our sins, God gave a Law to Moses so that people like us could gain a clue as to what transgression is and why we need to be saved from it, and how only Christ, who is God the Son and the offspring of Abraham, could keep the deal God cut with Abraham so long before.