

In Christ alone: Galatians 1v3-9

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[0 : 00] Verses 1-10 Paul, an apostle, sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers with me.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said, so now I say again, if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you have accepted, let him be eternally condemned.

Am I not now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

[1 : 33] Well, let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word, the Bible.

Thank you that it is written in our language, that we have access to it. Thank you that it speaks to us of your truth.

Truth we can trust. Truth we can build our life upon. Truth that brings life and life eternal.

And we ask, Holy Spirit of God, that you would give us understanding, not just with our minds, but this truth about Jesus Christ alone, would shape our hearts, change us in a way that helps us see that Jesus Christ is enough for all life.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I have a little equation for you as we start.

[2 : 53] That's not minus Christ, by the way. That's a little bullet point, so forget about the minus. But Christ plus what equals salvation?

Christ plus what equals salvation. Or, think of it in this way.

If you died tonight and you found yourself standing before God, and God asked you, why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say to God?

What's going to be your answer? Well, if your answer starts with something like this, because I, because I have been a good person, because I contribute to society, then you are not guaranteed salvation.

But if your answer goes something like this, because Christ, because Christ died for me, because Christ took the blame for my sin, then you are guaranteed salvation.

[4 : 10] You see, the answer to this equation is, Christ plus nothing equals salvation.

In other words, we're saying that Christ is enough. Christ is sufficient. That's what we've been singing and thinking about this morning. Our salvation is not what I do, it's not my performance, or my work, but what Christ has done for us.

So have a look at the reading in Galatians chapter 1, verse 3. Galatians 1, verse 3. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. So in a very succinct way, it's saying that Christ is sufficient. What Christ has done is enough.

We've been thinking about the Reformation and one of the Reformers, Ulrich Zwingli, put it like this. Through Christ alone, we are given salvation, blessedness, grace, pardon, and all that makes us in any way worthy or right in the sight of a righteous God.

[5 : 51] You see, if we're to try and earn our salvation, it will only break us and destroy us. If we're living a life whereby we think when we stand before God, we answer something like this, because I, and it's all about what I do, it will destroy you.

Martin Luther, who we met last week, one of the men responsible for the Reformation, he started his young life out as a law student. And in the grounds of the university where he studied, was a statue, a great big statue of Jesus.

And in one hand, Jesus is holding the weighing scales of justice. And in the grip of his teeth is the blade of a sword.

And this statue terrified Luther as he walked through the university grounds. He always felt like Christ was eyeballing him. And it continually made him feel guilty and under God's judgment. Well, in fear of God's judgment, Luther gave up studying law, chucked it all in, and he became a monk. He hoped in some way that this might please God or he could somehow earn his acceptance before God.

[7 : 15] Reflecting back on his life many years later, Luther wrote this. He says, I myself was a monk for 20 years. I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing.

The cold was enough to kill me. So he would literally go out into the snow, kneel down and pray in the freezing cold. I inflicted upon myself such pain as I would never inflict again, even if I could. He continued, if any monk ever got to heaven by monkery, great little word that, isn't it? Then I should have made it. If it lasted much longer, I would have killed myself with vigils, praying, reading, and the other labours.

You see, this young man, Martin Luther, tried to work for his salvation through praying, through reading, through all these different disciplines.

You see, the church had been teaching him that, yes, Christ had died for our sins, but it did not guarantee your eternal salvation. In fact, the church taught that you were somehow suspended on the one hand between the grace of God and the judgment of God.

[8 : 37] You swung between the two depending on how good you were. And the only way to avoid God's judgment at the end was to work off your sins through acts of confession or receiving grace through the sacraments so that the more time that you had communion or mass, well then, the more likely you were to be in favour with God.

And Luther was so troubled with his sins that he spent hours every day in confession. He feared that he was overlooking some sin that he wasn't aware of.

At one point, his superior, who he used to go confess to, said this, he was quite cross with him, look here, brother Martin, if you are going to confess so much, why don't you do something worth confessing?

Kill your mother or father, commit adultery, stop coming in here with such flumenry or nonsense and fake sins. this man was plagued so much with his guilt that he was desperate to try and find peace with God.

But it wasn't until he began to read the scriptures and study the Bible for himself that he came to see that salvation was guaranteed not by his works, but Christ's sufficient work on the cross.

[10 : 00] What he discovered was not new, it was a rediscovered truth from the Bible. By opening up the Bible for himself and reading what God had said, he came to see it was all about Jesus.

It's summarized like this, it's in the news sheet, you can read it there. salvation is according to scripture alone, maybe I have it here, it is there, salvation is according to scripture alone in Christ alone, that's the part we're going to look at today, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone.

Of course, this whole idea of Christ plus works or trying to earn or work for your salvation was nothing new.

The apostle Paul had to confront it in the church at Galatia, which is why we read from the beginning of Galatians. So let's turn there to verse 6, chapter 1, verse 6.

Paul had come to this church in Galatia, modern day Turkey, and had been preaching telling people the good news about Christ, and it was just Christ and nothing but Christ.

[11 : 18] But something had happened. Chapter 1, verse 6. He's writing to the church, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert or twist the gospel of Christ. So there were people who had heard the good news about Jesus, but now they were beginning to teach the rest of the church.

So like a similar situation to this, the leader, the pastor, would stand up and give a talk and they were saying, listen guys, you've started with Christ, but Christ is not enough.

You need something more. Christ will get you so far, but you need more than that. What you need to do is you need to be a good person. You need to obey everything that God said in his laws.

So it was Christ plus works equals salvation. Now this was far too serious to ignore. So Paul writes this whole letter of Galatians to address the issue.

[12:36] We pick it up again in chapter 2 verse 6. He wants to bring them back to the heart of the truth. So chapter 2, sorry, chapter 2 verse 16.

Chapter 2 verse 16. He says, we know that a man or a person is not justified. That simply means not declared right before God by observing the law, by doing good things, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be declared right before God by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, not by doing good things.

Because by observing the law, no one will be made right before God. So, verse 21, I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness, if right standing before God could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

If you can go it alone, then the death of Christ is a complete waste of time. if you think that you can stand before God and say, because I did X, Y, and Z, then I will be acceptable to God.

[14:10] If that's true, then Jesus Christ died for nothing. He might well not have been born. It's a complete waste of time. the point is, we cannot earn our acceptance.

Move on a little bit to chapter 5, verse 3. Chapter 5, verse 3.

Again, I declare to every person who lets himself be circumcised, so this was one of the laws of the Old Testament, one of the clean laws, that if you were circumcised, well then it would give you a right standing before God and acceptance before God.

This is what they came to think. He says, if you let yourself be circumcised, you're required to obey all the laws. So if you start out life saying it's about being good, then you must be perfectly good.

Verse 4. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from Christ.

[15:25] So to try and earn your way before God is to turn away from the very person, the only one, who can give you salvation.

Now you might be reading through this and you go, no, I don't believe that, or I do believe it, I know it's all about Christ.

But yet we believe and we practice certain things. So sometimes we say, yes, it's Christ plus reading my Bible. Or Christ plus so long as I don't get drunk or don't watch porn.

or it's Christ plus serving in the church or Christ plus getting baptized and becoming a member.

If I do all of these things, then my salvation will be guaranteed and then God will be pleased with me. He'll look at my life and see that I'm a good person.

[16:27] But these things, no matter how good they are, and they're all good and all evidences of someone who follows Christ, in and of themselves, they will never ever save you.

Which is why chapter 6 verse 14, almost the whole letter is concluded here in verse 14 of chapter 6. verse 14.

He says, May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. So go back to that illustration at the beginning.

If you're standing there before God, what am I going to say? What is our boasting? Is it something I have done, something I do?

or am I going to say it's all because of Jesus? I will boast in nothing else except in what Christ has done.

[17:26] It's Christ plus nothing equals salvation. We're going to see how this works out in more detail.

First, the need for Christ alone. The need for Christ alone. Go back to chapter 1, verse 3. Chapter 1, verse 3.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins.

We need Christ because of our sin. Now most of the time we think of sins as a weakness. Really, really bad sins and kind of little sins.

They're things that we can fix by ourselves, by being better people or by trying harder. We look at our life, we see things we don't like, we know it's wrong and we say, I can change that myself.

[18:39] I'm able to change my own life. But sin is not a weakness. It's not a lack of being good.

It's not about trying harder. Sin is a nature that we have, that we are born with. Our whole life is corrupt.

In fact, it's rebellion against God. Sin is a relational problem. It's our nature which is in conflict with God. So we don't relate to God as we should.

One author and writer by the name of Mike Reeves paraphrases something that Martin Luther said and he puts it like this. I think it's quite helpful.

Follow along with me as I read it. The problem of our sin goes as deep in us as it possibly can. all the way down into our hearts shaping what we want and love.

[19:45] As a result we never naturally want God. We freely choose to do the things we want but left to ourselves we shall never freely choose God because we do not naturally want him.

that's quite a statement to think about ourselves like that. We can't even if we wanted to choose to follow God.

Our sinful nature is such that we are in conflict with God. We don't have a weakness problem something we can fix ourselves we have a sinful nature that wants to take the place of God and that puts us on a collision course with God's wrath or God's judgment.

So have a look at chapter 3 and verse 10. Chapter 3 verse 10. As we go through Galatians you're getting a big overview of what the book is all about the letter is all about so chapter 3 verse 10.

He says all who rely on observing the law so everybody who tries to earn their salvation by doing good things or everyone who thinks they can fix their life themselves have the power within themselves to change themselves all who rely on observing the law are under a curse are under God's judgment for it is written there's a quote here from Deuteronomy in the Old Testament cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law so going back God had said to his people if you obey me you will be blessed if you love me as you should and do everything I tell you to do I will accept you if you disobey me you will be cursed if you don't love me as you should I will judge you so it was really quite simple obey

[22:03] God and you will avoid judgment but the problem was and the same problem exists for us as well we cannot obey God fully and completely we don't have that ability within ourselves to do it so as it says at the end of verse 10 cursed or judged is everyone who does not continue to do everything that God says now just try that maybe you're thinking here well you know what I can I can actually be a good person I can if I put my mind to it I can obey God and do everything he asked me to do well just try for one day to be a good person that means a whole day 24 hours without thinking saying or doing anything that you know you shouldn't just try it even try it for the duration of this meeting but you can't

I'm telling you now you can't you'll find out our sinful nature our inability to choose and obey God means we are under the curse of God we're under his judgment we deserve his judgment because we fight against him we want to replace him you see the greatest problem that we all face is not unemployment it's not getting sick it's not our mortgage repayments our greatest problem that we can face is God's justice because God is committed to judging sin all the evil all the wickedness that we see and read about on our news and and all the things we hear God must deal with that he's not going to let it go and that means God must judge my sin within my heart and because I have a sinful nature God must judge me sometimes we hear a phrase like this you know the difference between the sinner and the sin well we can't really separate the sin from the person we have a sinful nature and if

God is going to judge sin he's going to judge me you see without Christ I stand under the curse of God the judgment of God I need Christ and I need Christ alone second the sacrifice of Christ alone so look at verse 13 we get this wonderful response in verse 13 wonderful news Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us he became a curse for us that little phrase those two words for us means that Christ exchanged places with us

Christ becomes my sin he becomes my curse my judgment man I want to read a couple of quotes here they're quite long but you follow along with me they come again from Martin Luther who wrote a commentary like an explanation of what Galatians is all about and here's what he said on this issue follow along with me as I read all the weight of the matter stands on this word or phrase for us for Christ is innocent as concerning his own person so he's never done anything wrong he was perfect but Christ bears all the sins of all men in his body not that he is guilty of any but that he received them being committed or done by us and laid them on his own body we must know him to be wrapped in our sins in our curse in our death and in all our evils as he is wrapped in our flesh and blood whatever sins

I you or we all have done or shall do hereafter they are Christ's own sins or else we would perish forever again let me read another one follow with me our most merciful father seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law and that we could never be delivered from it of our own power sent his only son into the world and laid upon him all the sins of all men saying be thou Peter that denier Paul that persecutor and cruel oppressor David that adulterer that sinner who did eat the fruit in Eden that was Adam that thief who hanged upon the cross and be thou that person who has committed the sins of all men see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them now just think about that last bit where he begins to personalize it it's like saying to

[28 : 10] Jesus you've become Peter the denier Jesus you've become Paul the persecutor Jesus you've become David the adulterer now put yourself in that situation Jesus doesn't just take our sin he takes our place it's like he becomes us in love Christ becomes sin for us.

But that means justice must still be done. Sin must be punished. The curse must fall. Either it will fall on us or it will fall on someone else.

So Christ becomes sin for us and therefore he is cursed for us. Verse 13. Let's read verse 13 again. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written and again it's a quote from the Old Testament cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

So the curse, the judgment, the punishment for not fully obeying God and doing everything as God has said is judgment. It was death.

[29 : 38] Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. So in taking my sin on himself Christ now becomes guilty deserving of judgment.

And as Christ died on the cross he is being treated as a sinner because at that moment Christ is a sinner. With his arms nailed to the cross his feet nailed to the cross the curse falls not on us but it falls instead on Jesus.

He absorbed the wrath for my sin. John's Gospel that we read earlier as we were singing at the end of the Gospel where Jesus dies John records there that as Jesus died he cried out it is finished. In other words it's over. At the cross justice has been done. Sin has been punished once and for all. There's nothing left for us to do.

Let me quote again from Martin Luther on his commentary in Galatians. He says this follow along with me Let us receive this most sweet doctrine this sweet truth so full of comfort with thanksgiving and with assured faith which teaches that Christ being made a curse for us that is a sinner under the wrath of God put upon himself our person and laid our sins on his own shoulders saying I have committed the sins which all men have committed because he has taken upon himself our sins not by constraint not because he was forced but of his own good will it pleased him to bear the punishment and wrath of God not for his own person not for his own good but for our person for our good so making a happy exchange with us he took upon himself our sinful person and gave unto us his innocent and victorious person wherewith we being now clothed are freed from the curse of the law he's telling us that the sacrifice of Christ alone is sufficient to deal with our sin and our deserved judgment so when we stand before God it's not because I it's because Christ third the rewards or if you're taking notes you might like to change the word rewards to blessings because I think sometimes when you say reward it's something you earn or you're thinking you earn so change that to blessing so the blessing through Christ alone the blessings that we receive because of what Christ has done are told for us in chapter 3 verse 26 look at chapter 3 verse 26 you are all sons or all children of God through faith in Christ

[33 : 17] Jesus by trusting your life to Christ alone by boasting in Christ alone our life is forever changed our identity changes our future changes instead of receiving curse we now receive blessing two things quickly that we receive two wonderful blessings if our faith is in Christ alone first we become children of God by faith in Christ alone I am adopted into the family of God I become a

son or a daughter of God the barrier of sin is completely removed so I am now treated as God's own son so look at verse 6 of chapter 4 verse 6 because you are sons God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts the spirit who calls out

Abba which means father you see without Christ our relationship with God is one of guilt and judgment we are just like Martin Luther wandering around the university grounds terrified of God but now because of Christ I can call him father I am loved and treasured as his own son the relationship that Christ has with the father now becomes ours to enjoy and that means when you or I sin and we continue to sin we don't need to run in fear from God we can come to the father without fear we can come in repentance knowing that he accepts us forgives us loves us no longer do I need to hide my sin from him no longer do I need to try and fix my own life I no longer need to fear him

I can now come to him and enjoy him and receive from him that blessing of being a child of God but not only that we also become heirs of God look at verse 7 chapter 4 verse 7 so you are no longer a slave but a son and since you are a son God has made you also an heir now the eldest son in the family maybe you are here the eldest child in your family the eldest son in the family always was the legal heir to the father's estate so when the father died everything would legally be transferred to the eldest son he would inherit everything that belonged to the father now because of Christ we are now treated by God as if we are the eldest son we have become heirs so all that belongs to Christ the true eldest son now becomes ours today we have an inheritance a glorious future to look forward to and the good news of that is that even when I sin even when I mess up I am not disqualified from that inheritance even when I fail and fall God doesn't strike me out and say that's too many times you are no longer going to receive your inheritance because Christ has dealt with my sin past present and future I am guaranteed that future inheritance with him so salvation is in Christ alone remember that equation at the very beginning it is Christ plus nothing equals salvation not because

I but because Christ let's pray together may I never boast that