

Galatians 3:6-14

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Good to see you this morning. We're going to continue our sermon series in the book of Galatians. We're looking at Galatians chapter 3 this morning. That's page 973 in your pew Bible, if you want to turn there. We're going to look at verses 6 through 14. Galatians chapter 3, verses 6 through 14, page 973. Before we dive into this passage, remember just a little translation note that Matt mentioned last week. Verse 6, if you read different translations, you'll see that verse 6 is sometimes placed differently in the text. Sometimes translators put it as going with the rhetorical question in verse 5. Sometimes they put it with Paul's thought in verse 7. It really doesn't change the sense that much. This morning, as we've kind of talked about this as a staff, we're going to take it. We're going to take verse 6 with verse 7. So if you look down at your text, you see the little question mark after verse 6? Just imagine that that comes after verse 5. And the whole thing just reads beautifully. So that's how I'm going to read it this morning.

Galatians chapter 3, verses 6 through 14. Let me read this for us. Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited, counted to him as righteousness, know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed, along with Abraham, a man of faith. 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.

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 a faith. 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 Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. Would you pray with me? Our Father, we come again to your word this morning, asking that you would, by your spirit, open up our minds and our hearts to receive what you are saying to us. Lord, even in this passage, we see that scripture speaks your words. So Lord, we trust this morning that you are speaking to us in your word. And Lord, this is a great act of kindness that you would come and you would reveal yourself and you would speak to us. So Lord, would you give us receptive hearts? Would you give us sharp minds? Would you give us tender spirits? Lord, would you reveal your son to us this morning in a fresh and new way so that we might be truly blessed? We pray this in his name, in Christ's name. Amen.

[3 : 2 3] Well, you can see that this passage is all about cursing and blessing. And you know, we don't think much in terms of blessing and cursing these days, do we? At least not in the biblical sense. Today, we might say someone is blessed if they're unusually talented, right? They've been blessed with, say, musical abilities or prowess on the sports field. Or more often, we say someone is blessed if they've been successful financially, right? Someone with a nice car, someone with a big house, oh, they're blessed.

But that's not what our passage is getting at this morning. What about cursing? Yeah? Today, cursing is what someone would do on I-95 when they're cut off, perhaps with a choice word or a strategically raised digit. But that's not the kind of cursing we're talking about. Nor is this the curse that you would learn, say, at a place like Hogwarts, some kind of magic spell to bring someone into harm or misery.

It's not that kind of curse. You know, one place where we still actually use blessing in a way that gets close to the biblical meaning is when a couple wants to get married. Some couples, even today, will still ask for the blessing of their parents before they tie the knot. Now, for some people, this might just be a hollow ritual, something that's not much more than an empty gesture. But think

about what's being sought in that instance. What is it? It's the favor and approval of the parents, is it not?

It's for the parents to say, yes, we are for you, we're behind you, we're in support of you, we're with you, you have our blessing. It's a powerful thing to have someone's favor, to have their approval, isn't it? Or as the Bible would say, to have their blessing. As humans, we seem to be hardwired this way. I mean, after all, who doesn't want the favor of their boss? And who doesn't want their parents to be behind them? And who doesn't want to know that their friends are for them or truly with them? And who doesn't want a spouse who will look at them and be pleased? The reverse, of course, is also true. Think of the millions of dollars that are spent every year in therapy to recover from the lasting wounds of being rejected. That's what the Bible means by curse, after all. To be cast out, to be disowned, to be rejected.

Who of us can't remember the first time we were dumped? The images are coming to your mind, even now, that fateful day when Susie met you by your locker after last period and said, oh, I don't think we should go out anymore. And even though she swore, it's not you, it's me, the rejection still cut your heart like a dull cafeteria knife. And for the rest of eighth grade, you knew that you could never love anyone ever again, ever. And we laugh, of course. But we laugh because it's true.

[6 : 30] To be rejected, to be cast out, to be cursed, oh my, how it shapes us. So you see, this whole matter of blessing and cursing, it's not about money, it's not about magic, it's about relationship. It's about something intimate and real and very raw in our day-to-day life.

And that's what the Bible is really all about, after all, relationship. It's about the most important relationship of all. How can we humans have a relationship with God?

How can we know God's blessing? How can we know his eternal pleasure over us? And how can we avoid God's curse? His final rejection of all that he opposes?

Now, you might not have noticed it at first, but in verses 6 through 14 of Galatians chapter 3, Paul is really retelling almost the whole story of the Bible. Almost the whole arc of redemptive history is contained in these nine verses. Look again with me. What do you see? Abraham, law, Christ, spirit. And if you remember that the prophet Habakkuk, who Paul quotes in verse 11, lived during the time of the kings, you have just about the full sweep of the Bible storyline, don't you? From God calling Abraham to the institution of the law through Moses at Sinai, to the period of growth and decline during the monarchy, to the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, and finally to the outpouring of the promised spirit. It's almost all there.

Now, that's important for us to see for a couple of reasons, for a few reasons. First, it's helpful just in orienting to this passage to help us to see that Paul isn't just cherry-picking random verses and patching them together to make an argument. There's robust and deep thinking at work here. You know, I sometimes think reading Paul is a lot like looking at a Jackson Pollock painting.

[8 : 28] You know, the ones where it looks like a guy just sort of dribbled paint all over the canvas, and you go to the museum and you think, well, my kid could have done that. But when you take a step back and you take a second look, you see that there's incredible control and symmetry. That there's a master actually at work there. That there's movement and color.

There's power and intentionality, and it's worth a good long look. You know, in the same way, Paul's not just splattering a couple verses here and there to pull one over on his audience.

No, these paint strokes are actually very controlled. They're the result of a master who knows his medium well. Second, seeing the underlying narrative at work here helps us to see more precisely what Paul is trying to do, what he's trying to say. Remember, in verses 1 through 5 of chapter 3, Paul was appealing to the Galatians' religious experience to prove his point, and now in verses 6 through 14, he's appealing to scripture. But notice, his appeal to scripture isn't an exercise in proof texting. You see, Paul's opponents were quoting scripture too, probably lots of it. It's almost certain that they quoted Genesis 17. That's where God tells Abraham to get circumcised as a sign of his covenant with him. Well, you can read a chapter like that out of context and get pretty confused, can't you? And these false teachers probably piled up verse upon verse until the Galatians started doubting all that they had been taught. And that happens today too. Someone will pick a random passage out of the Old Testament and say, see, if you really believe the Bible, you'd have to never cut your sideburns. You don't believe that, do you? So they try to throw Christians into doubt by making the Bible seem culturally regressive or just plain silly. But you see, understanding the Bible is more than just proof texting. And this starts to get at the heart of what Paul's doing here. The Bible Paul is showing us is a narrative. It's headed somewhere. It's not an encyclopedia of truths

that you can cite willy-nilly to make a point. You have to put the passages in their proper place in the story if you really want to understand them. Imagine picking up a Charles Dickens novel, reading a passage at random, and then saying, see, there's what Dickens thought about slavery. Trust me, that won't get you an A on your term paper. And if that kind of reading will flunk you out of freshman English, why do we think we can do the same thing with the Bible? You have to know the big picture to see how the pieces fit together. You see, the false teachers in Galatia were quoting Genesis 17 and saying, see, if you want to have God's blessing, if you want to belong to God and know he's pleased with you, you have to get circumcised. It's really quite plain, right, from the text. But in verse 6 of our text this morning, Paul fills in the bigger picture. You see, further back than Genesis 17, in chapter 15, we read that long before Abraham was ever circumcised, God declared him to be righteous through faith. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. But that's not all.

In verse 8, Paul goes on to quote Genesis 12, going even further back to show that even before God reckoned Abraham righteous through faith, he had all along planned on the Gentiles, on the nations being blessed the same way. In you, God says, all the nations shall be blessed. So the point is this, if you want to understand the Bible, you've got to get the big picture. You've got to see how the pieces fit together. And that will save us from a whole world of bad thinking about what the Bible does and doesn't say. If you want a good start in doing that, there are a number of good resources that can help you as an aside here. There's a really good book downstairs in the book stall called God's Big Picture by Vaughn Roberts. I highly recommend it. It will be a good entree to seeing how the Bible fits together. But there's a third reason why it's important to see the underlying narrative in verses 6 through 14. And this really starts to get us close to Paul's argument. [12:52] You see, there are really two ways of approaching the Bible. On the one hand, you can read it primarily as a book of rules. And the narrative bits are really there here and there just to serve as illustration, to highlight the rules, to give us examples, to make it a little more clear what we have to do. And in this way, you read the Bible as if it were primarily about you. About what you have to do in order to get God's blessing. And that's basically how the false teachers in Galatia were reading the Bible. And honestly, that's what most people think about Christianity today. It's a bunch of rules you have to follow in order to get God to bless you. And you see, that's a very appealing way to approach the Bible and religion. Because ultimately, it makes us the hero, doesn't it?

We get to be in control. We get the glory for crossing the finish line. Thank you very much. We get to divide the world up into good people and bad people. And we get to put ourselves in the good people column, of course. And that makes us feel very good about ourselves and very self-congratulatory.

But there's another way to read the Bible. And that's what Paul is doing here. He's showing us that we must read the Bible not primarily as a book of rules, but as a narrative. As a true story of what God has done in order to redeem us and win us and so to bless us. And when you read the Bible like that, suddenly it stops being primarily about your actions and becomes primarily about God's actions.

God becomes the hero. He's the one who gets the glory. And the world suddenly is no longer divided into good people and bad people, those who perform and those who don't perform, but into people who know they need a redeemer. And on the other hand, those who keep trying to redeem themselves.

So there are two fundamentally opposed approaches to religion, the Bible, God, the whole thing. One sees it as a matter of God's rules to keep, and the other sees it as a matter of God's acts, God's deeds to trust. Or as Paul will say, works and faith. One thinks we can get God's blessing through doing, the other sees we can only receive God's blessing through trusting. And here's what's at stake. Paul says doing only leaves one under God's curse. Look at verse 10. It's a stunning reversal of everything that Paul's opponents were teaching. They said, do the works of the law and you'll be blessed. Paul says, rely on the works of the law and you're under a curse. And then he quotes from the law itself. Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them. And the unstated premise here, of course, is that no one can actually keep the law in its entirety. No one can actually abide by everything written in the book of the law and do them all the time.

[16 : 07] And so relying on the law just leaves one under God's curse because we can't actually keep it. Now, at first glance, that seems a bit unfair, doesn't it? Let's be honest. It seems like God sets up an impossible standard that we can't keep and then says, I'm going to curse you, I'm going to reject you if you don't keep it. It kind of sounds like me saying to my son, Jack, unless you obey me perfectly every day without fail from now until the time you die, I'm going to disown you. That of course would make me a terrible parent, would it not?

But is that the picture of God that we get here? No, actually it's not. You see, the law doesn't make me a sinner. It simply reveals that I already am one.

The law is kind of like an anatomy textbook. Some of you doctors can correct me on this afterwards if I'm way off, but my guess is that an anatomy textbook shows you what the human body is supposed to look like. It's what it's supposed to look like when there's nothing wrong with it, when all the parts are working well. It contains the image of an ideal, healthy human body. Now, if after looking at an anatomy textbook, I realize that something is terribly wrong with my health, I've only got nine digits or something like that.

Is that the textbook's fault? No. It's simply revealing what's already the case. It's bringing to light my problem. It's the same with God's law.

God's law shows us the perfect expression of how humanity is meant to live before God. And if after looking into the law, I realize that I'm not living up to it, it's not the law's fault. It's mine.

[18 : 09] The law hasn't made me a sinner, but it's revealed that I am one. And the function of the law is to state in black and white, so you can't miss it, what is already the case.

That we're cursed. That we're cut off. That we deserve God's active rejection for our rebellion against him. But you know, the curse of the law is something that most of us don't really face up to. Instead, I think it's something that we bury. And there are a million ways to bury it. This curse of the law. You can bury it under your work.

Good work, even. Work that benefits the community and provides for your family. You can bury it under your relationships, meaningful friendships, where you have lots in common and have rich conversations.

You can bury it under entertainment, football games, endless streams of music on your iPod, movies and arts and drama, award-winning movies, groundbreaking drama even.

[19 : 13] Yes, we try to bury it, but it won't go away. That profound nagging that our lives are somehow out of sync with we know not what.

That profound sense that we have that a piece is somehow missing. That sense we have that despite all the work and all the love and all the art, there's still an ache that doesn't go away. And all that is symptomatic of the fact that we've been cut off from God's presence. That we stand under the curse of the law.

But of course we can bury it with all sorts of religious activity too, can't we? And this becomes the most deadly because we think we're actually doing something that will surely fix the problem. We're serving God, we're doing his will, we're making sacrifices for him, we're giving large sums of money to the church, we're praying, oh we're praying lots and lots of prayers, we're attending meetings, we're even starting ministries.

And this is why in church, people can sometimes be completely miserable and utterly joyless. Because for all they're doing, the curse remains.

[20 : 32] But Paul tells us that doing will never do. Verse 11, Now it's evident that no one will be justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith.

You see, instead of burying the curse of the law, there's another way. There's one who has come not to bury it, but to bear it.

To bear our curse, and to take it away. And whom we can trust to do it for us. Paul writes in verse 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 hanged on a tree. And friends, with this verse, we stare straight into the heart of the gospel.

We all deserve God's curse because of our sin, and despite all our attempts to bury it, we can't make it go away. But Christ comes to bear our curse on the cross, in our place, to receive the penalty our sins deserve so that we can go free.

[21 : 48] So that we can come out from under the curse of the law and be redeemed. But do we feel how shocking this verse actually is?

You know, it would have struck Paul's listeners, especially Paul's opponents, as utterly scandalous. You know, if I might paraphrase what Paul is saying here, he's saying that Jesus is a God-damned Messiah.

Does that sound like blasphemy? Does that sound like something you shouldn't say in church? But quite literally, that is exactly what happened at the cross.

The very curse of God, the damnation for all our sins came down on Christ. Imagine the infinite horror of that moment.

The eternal Son of God rejected, cursed by the Father. And just think, you know that the pain of rejection is intensified by the intimacy of the relationship, right?

[22 : 56] You know, if a close friend hurts you, that can hurt for a long time. But if a spouse rejects you, that can hurt for a lifetime. Now imagine the rejection endured by Jesus, the very Son of God, who had enjoyed eternal intimacy with the Father before the world began.

No one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father, Jesus once said, revealing to us just a glimpse of the boundless intimacy that existed between them. But at the cross, Jesus cries, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The cry of a man who's been rejected, cursed, and cut off.

in that moment, Christ descended into the depths of hell, the place of utter God-forsakenness, eternal condemnation.

And all this was done for us, we're told. It was our place to die. It was our place to be cursed.

[24 : 08] But Jesus stood in our place. And as the fangs of the law sunk into him, we were being set free.

Jesus bore my curse away.

And in its place, verse 14 tells us, we receive blessing. This is the great exchange of the gospel. He takes our curse and gives us his blessing.

And you see, it's not just a clean slate what Christianity offers us. It's not just a second chance, but the fullness of God's face shining upon us. He's pleased with you, and infinitely, unconditionally so, because of Christ.

How do you imagine God's demeanor toward you right now? You know, when I hear a knock at my office door and I say, come in, and it happens to be Beth bringing my son Jack to see me, do you know what happens?

[25 : 21] my face lights up. It's my son! I get up. I take him in my arms. I look at all eight teeth that he has right now. I sit him on my lap. I'm delighted over him.

And when God looks at you, Christian, he is filled with delight. A delight that will never waver. A delight that cannot waver.

God's pleasure over you is not determined by your performance. God's delight over you is not determined by your doing.

The basis of God's blessing over you rather is the perfect performance of his son. Just as your sin and curse were transferred to Christ, though Christ did not deserve it, so his righteousness and blessing are transferred to you, though you will never deserve it.

Oh, and that has profound implications. For starters, because we're blessed in Christ, doesn't it change how we face adversity?

[26 : 35] you've lost your job, you've wrecked your car, your relationships are blowing up, your health is giving away. But whatever is going on in your life right now, whatever your circumstances are, you can know this, it isn't because God is angry at you.

It isn't because God is punishing you for your sin. If you've placed your trust in Christ, the curse for your sin has been utterly exhausted, it's gone, carried away on the cross.

God may be correcting you like a loving father, he may be purifying you like precious metal, but it is not, and it cannot be God's punishment for your sin. That's over and done with, you see.

He's pleased with you now. So in your adversity, instead of running from God, or feeling ashamed because you think you've really botched things up this time, instead go to God.

He's not going to shake his head and say I told you so. He's not going to meet you with a stern gaze and a tight lip, but with tenderness and favor, he will meet you in the midst of your adversity and love you and sustain you and carry you through.

[27 : 59] You're blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. But if being blessed in Christ changes how we meet adversity, it also changes how we meet prosperity. Your financial well-being is not the

register of how close you are to God, of how blessed you are.

If things are going well in your life, it's not because God happens to be particularly well-pleased with you in this moment. Yes, whatever good things you've received, you've received from God.

He is the giver of all good gifts. But good things don't come your way because you particularly deserve them. They aren't rewards for our good moral efforts or our particularly vibrant faith.

You see, if that were the case, then whatever good came our way would be ours to just kind of selfishly enjoy in ourselves because they're what we deserve. They're our wages. That's what God's supposed to give us. But no, you see, whatever we have, whether it is a lot or whether it is a little, is given to us so that we might exercise God-glorifying stewardship.

So that we might be a blessing to others and meet their needs. You see, our true blessing, after all, is the relationship we have with God. God. Do you remember when God came to Abraham and he didn't have a son and he was doubting and the Lord came to Abraham and said, Abraham, I'm your shield.

[29 : 31] Abraham, I'm your reward. It's the relationship that we have with God, a relationship that will continue on into eternity. And friend, if that is your true blessing, then your stuff is just a tool.

It's just a tool to help and administer to others. But verse 14 doesn't just talk about the blessing, does it? But also the promised spirit.

You see, the Old Testament foresaw a time when God's own presence would fill and abide with his people in unprecedented ways. Ways they could only dream of.

There would be, as it were, a transposition of their very relationship and fellowship with God. And when that happened, it would be like water flowing through the desert.

Trees would sprout up, grass would grow, pools of cool water would abound. The wasteland of our spiritual existence would begin to look like a garden of God's good presence.

[30 : 40] people would get new hearts. The knowledge of God would deepen in unheard of ways. Their lives would be transformed.

Their communities would be renewed. And that, Paul says, all of that is happening now in our day because Jesus has won our redemption on the cross.

The Father has sent the Son to accomplish the work of redemption and now Father and Son have sent the Spirit to indwell His people and to apply this great work of redemption to our hearts and our lives and our churches and our communities.

Conviction of sin, regeneration, growth and holiness, a greater understanding and love for God's Word, gifts for serving one another, deep assurance for God's love, all of these come flowing forth from the activity of God's Spirit indwelling the believer, indwelling the church.

We often long for God to be more active in our life. Do you? We want God to show up. And yes, we should pray boldly.

[32 : 01] We should pray more boldly as a church that God would glorify His name through us, through us, His people. But often we forget that every believer is always already sealed with the promised Spirit.

And the problem is sometimes that we often don't know how to recognize the signs of God's activity. Is the Bible making more and more sense to you as you read it month after month or year after year?

Are you seeing qualities like patience and kindness and goodness growing in you? Qualities that a year or two ago would not have described you? Are you seeing more and more of your sin?

Are you repenting more open and more often and more deeply? are you finding that your relationship with fellow church members is just inexplicably encouraging?

You might not be able to put your finger on it but the conversation you had over coffee last week with a fellow believer just seemed to keep you going for another week. Do you have times when reading scripture or listening to a sermon where you have a deep sense of assurance that God loves you in Christ?

[33 : 27] If any of these things are happening in your life then be assured God is at work. The Holy Spirit is flowing like a stream through the growing garden of your soul.

He is there and he is present and he is working. Pray that you would recognize his work more and more. Pray that you would enjoy the fellowship you have with him more and more.

Pray that you would learn to keep in step with him more and more. The blessing and the Spirit. But finally the stunning and amazing point of this whole passage how does one get all this?

Paul's answer is simple. As simple as it is profound. Look again at verse 14. Almost like bookends to the whole verse. In Christ Jesus through faith.

You see friends Jesus is alive right now. Yes he tasted death on the cross but he has risen and he has ascended to the Father's right hand. He is not just some historical figure buried in the sands of time.

[34 : 46] He lives right now. He is the hero of the Bible. It all comes to a head in him and to enjoy the blessings that he is ready to shower on all of his children.

On all of his brothers and sisters. We can be personally and vitally united to him and so receive them.

And how do we do this? Through faith. Through faith. One writer put it this way.

Faith is simple trust in a reliable person or thing. It is simply the relational glue that attaches us to Christ.

Christ. It is all simply through faith. All the blessings of Christ by faith alone. Isn't that incredible news?

[35 : 46] That when you come to church on Sundays it is not about a regimen to perform. That when you come to church on Sundays what you get is not a list of duties to check off.

But what you get is a message to believe. And along with that message comes the infinite favor and blessing of God pouring down upon you.

It is incredible news. And it is news for you fellow Christian. Paul is writing to Christians at Galatia remember? The message is for us brother.

It is for us sister. And it is a message that is calling us to be free this morning. To get a hold once again of this stunning news that we can have Christ and all of his blessings simply through faith.

The curse lifted. The blessing received. The promised spirit at work. Not through our own doing but through his. Martin Luther once wrote when by the spirit of God I understood these words the just shall live by faith.

[37 : 04] Then I felt born again like a new man. I entered through open doors into the very paradise of God. Do you get a taste of that joy and rapture when you hear this message that you can be justified through faith alone?

friend if following Christ has lost its joy or its sweetness for you then perhaps you need to remember that the infinite blessings of Christ are ours simply through faith offered at great cost to him but received free of charge by us.

Lay your deadly doing down the old hymn says. Down at Jesus' feet. Stand in him, in him alone gloriously complete.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, I pray for my brothers and sisters this morning and I pray for myself Lord that this glorious good news Jesus that you became a curse for us so that we might become a blessing in God's eyes and that all of this is entered into simply through faith Lord I pray that that would be a fresh and new and joyful message for us this morning and it would change how we approach each and every day of our lives.

Lord as we come to your table this morning to remember your body broken and your blood shed Lord I pray that this would be an act a meal that reminds us of the deep blessing that we have in you.

[39 : 09] Lord as simply as we eat the bread as easily as we drink the cup so surely you have washed our sins away and granted us your favor and your blessing.

God we ask all this in Christ's name amen. Amen. Amen.