

July 6, 2025

Galatians 3:1-14, 26-29

If you would have heard the way I yelled at my daughter a few weeks ago, you may have thought that I was an out-of-control maniac that has no business raising children- unless you know that she was running toward Tratt Street from our driveway with cars speeding by. How else do you teach a small child that the street is dangerous? I wanted her to be shocked by my voice, so she would know that running that way makes Dad upset, and eventually she'll understand why. If you've ever loved children, you get it. If you see the way that Paul is speaking to the Galatians Christians in this letter, you might think he's an abrasive, unloving, insulting, maniac that has no business being a pastor. But the Galatians Christians were sprinting into the street. They had abandoned the Gospel of Jesus, and had therefore abandoned Jesus, and they didn't even realize it. False Christian teachers, who scholars call "Judaizers" infiltrated the churches and taught, "Yes, you are saved by believing in Jesus, but if you really want to be saved, you need to be circumcised like us Jewish people since we are the original people of God. Yes, you are saved by God's grace, but you need to do some of the works of God's Old Testament Law if you *really* want to be a Christian." And in this letter, Paul is showing why this is not only false, but absolutely destructive to one's faith- because this teaching, or any teaching that says that Jesus' death on the cross isn't enough to save you, and you have to do more to be truly saved, robs God of his glory, and robs God's people of the peace, joy, and comfort that he wants them to have. And Paul is continuing his effort to call his people back to the truth of Jesus in this letter, and specifically, he does it in three distinct arguments, and then ends the chapter with a beautiful proclamation of what the Gospel means.

1. Argument 1- Personal Experience. Paul starts this chapter and calls the Galatians "fools." He's not saying that they are unintelligent or stupid. Literally, he's saying they are "unknowing." They forgot something that they used to know- it's almost like they've been bewitched or brainwashed. Because Paul very clearly preached the Gospel of Jesus to them, Christ was vividly preached to them as God crucified and killed so that they could be forgiven, and they believed it! They were Christians! And now they are abandoning that truth! How could they- they should know this firstly because of their own personal experience. Paul asks them- how did you receive the Holy Spirit? How did you become a Christian and come to the faith? And how did God produce miracles in your churches? We aren't sure what kind of miracles Paul's speaking of, but in the early church, God often provided miraculous healings and visions to Christians, and Paul is asking- "did you have all this happen to you because you were so obedient to God's rules? Were you converted by following God's Law? No- it was when you believed in the Gospel. So then why would you think that you will grow in the Christian faith by anything other than believing the Gospel?" Paul is making a crucial point here, and it can't be ignored. Often, Christians think that the Gospel of Jesus- his death on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, is the starting point of Christianity. By believing that, you are saved. But if you want to grow in the faith and become a more advanced Christian, you need to move past the Gospel and start

learning to obey all the rules. I've heard people talk like this! Years ago, in Milwaukee, a Christian teacher once said, "Lutherans just care about the Gospel. That's all you talk about! I get it! Let's move on!" Of course, God wants us to grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and we aren't advocating for a "Jesus loves me this I know, and that's all I want to know" kind of faith. What Paul is saying is this: the way you grow in your Christian faith and mature and become more like Jesus is not by looking at all the rules and determining that you are now going to be more like Jesus. If you are a Christian, and you want to be more patient, or more forgiving, or more faithful, or more loving toward your spouse, or more courageous in sharing the faith, which I hope all of us do want to grow, the way to do it is NOT to focus on forgiveness, courage, faithfulness, patience, and say, "Come on! Do it! Be better!" If you are a Christian, and you'd like to be more patient with people, remember the Gospel, and remember how patient Jesus has been with you, even when you sinned against him again, and again. If you'd like to be more generous, consider, ponder how generous Christ was with you, saving you not with gold or silver, but with his infinitely precious blood. If you'd like to be more forgiving, consider how many times Christ has willingly forgiven you. And over time, as you ponder and relearn the Gospel of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will transform you to be more and more like Jesus. It doesn't happen through the Law, but through the Gospel.

2. Argument 2: Abraham. Paul states his second reason why the Galatians shouldn't abandon the Gospel: Abraham. That may seem odd, but it's not when you remember this: One of the most important questions to early Christians and 1st Century Jews was the same question Coach Boone asked Gary Bertier in the movie "Remember the Titans:" *"Who's your daddy?"* You see, 2000 years before Jesus walked the earth, God approached a man named Abraham, and he promised that he would make Abraham into a great nation of people, he would have children, and his children would have children, and so on, and through this great nation from Abraham, all people on earth would be blessed. And his nation would be God's people forever. That nation was Israel- the Jews. So if you were to ask many Jewish people why they knew they were saved, they might have said, "Because Abraham is my Father. I'm a son or daughter of Abraham, and Abraham's descendents are God's people, so I'm part of God's people." These false teachers were then bringing this idea into the Galatian churches, saying, "Well, the people that are saved are Abraham's children, so if you want to be saved, you need to be like Abraham, and Abraham got circumcised. So you need to be circumcised and be like us who are naturally children of Abraham, and maybe you can be an adopted child of Abraham." And Paul here is saying, "You want to talk about Abraham? Let's talk about Abraham." And he quotes Genesis 15, like we saw today, that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Think about what that means! Because Abraham believed God, not just believed in him, but believed him, that he would do what he promised, even if it seemed impossible, through that, God viewed Abraham, treated Abraham, forgave Abraham, rejoiced in Abraham as if he were perfectly holy, righteous, and holy- all before he was circumcised, or followed any of God's Law. Abraham was righteous and saved all by believing God. Therefore, to truly be connected to Abraham, to be a child of

Abraham, isn't to have the same blood as Abraham, but the same faith as Abraham. Paul's not making this up! It's right there in the Old Testament, too.

3. Argument 3- The Old Testament Passages. Paul then does something brilliant. He points to the passages that the false teachers were likely using to trick the Galatian Christians into thinking that they needed to do some extra work in order to be saved. The first passage they would have brought up would be from Deuteronomy- "Cursed is everyone who doesn't do all the things in the book of the Law. See? That means you better get to work! Faith isn't enough!" And Paul says, "read that again." If you are going to rely on your religious performance, your obedience to God's Law for salvation in any way, you'd better be perfect. That's God's standard. You have to obey all the rules- not just the ones that you like. The problem wasn't that the false teachers took God's rules too seriously, it's that they didn't take them seriously enough! Paul then quotes Habakkuk the prophet- the Righteous, the truly perfect people in God's eyes, will live by faith. It's absolutely possible that someone could follow many of God's rules, but God isn't interested in blind obedience. He wants your heart- not just your money or works. Luther says it like this: *"Faith in God constitutes the highest worship, the prime duty, the first obedience, and the foremost sacrifice. Without faith God forfeits His glory, wisdom, truth, and mercy in us. The first duty of man is to believe in God and to honor Him with his faith. Faith is truly the height of wisdom, the right kind of righteousness, the only real religion... Faith says to God: 'I believe what you say.'" And if someone were to say, "Sure, faith is good, but I want to earn some of God's rewards by what I do, too!" Paul says, "No. It's one or the other. You are either saved by faith alone, or by works alone. It can't be both because those who do the works of the Law will live by *them*. So it had better be good! And if it's not, then only shame, punishment, and death can follow. Cursed is everyone who doesn't do everything in this book of the Law, they deserve shame, torture, and death- to be hung outside the community as an example of what happens to those who rebel against God- that's what that last passage is referring to- people who sinned so badly they were executed were hung out as an example of shame. And if we don't follow God's rules, that's what we all deserve forever. But look at what Paul says: *That's exactly why Christ came- so he could hang in punishment, shame, and death in our place, so that we could receive the perfection and glory in his place.* By faith in Jesus, that's what you have. Why would you give that up, Galatians?*

Therefore, Paul concludes, you are all *sons*, not just children, *sons of God*. That's a radical statement. The NIV says, "Children," but more literally, Paul says you are all "sons" of God. In the ancient world, daughters didn't receive inheritance from their parents. Only sons did. But the Gospel says that both the men and the women are "sons" in that they receive everything. No difference. What's the inheritance? They clothed with Christ. *"His robes for mine: such anguish none can know Christ, God's beloved, condemned as though His foe. He, as though I, accursed and left alone. I, as though He, embraced and welcomed home!"* And look at what Paul does- he points to your baptism. When you are baptized, the Holy Spirit creates faith, even if it's a small child, and everything Christ has, the perfection of God himself, is given to you all for free. That's

who you are. That's why, in a world where the Greeks would often quote the philosopher Thales and say, "Thanks be to Fortune that I am not a low-class person, I am not a barbarian, and I am not a woman" and in a world where Jewish men at this time would pray every morning, "God, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, that I am not a slave, that I am not a woman," Paul can say "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female." That's not what defines you. You are sons of God, heirs of salvation through faith. It doesn't matter what race you are, what gender you are, what social class you are- if you are a Christian, you are a beloved son and heir of God. Period. It's as if Paul were to say to you, "There is no liberal or conservative. There is no popular or unpopular. There is no black or white. There is no successful or failure. There is no have and have-not. That's not who you are- you are sons of God because of what Jesus has done. That's the Gospel. Why would you want to forget that?"

Warren Kinghorn is a successful Psychologist and professor, and he talks about the difference the Gospel makes in his life, and his temptation of a false Gospel in a book called "Uncommon Living." *I have learned that being a Christians is not ultimately about mastery and control, either of myself or of others, or of the world, but about embracing the vulnerability, dependence, and love that comes with living inside the life of Jesus embraced by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit as God's beloved child, and resting there. Every day I still feel the power and pull of the Gospel of achievement and competence. It continues to permeate the world of healthcare and especially the world of research universities. But it is a false Gospel... The Gospel of achievement and competence with its promise of individual worth and sanctification through hard work and success is not the good news Jesus proclaimed. It is a characteristically American Gospel. But it is not the Gospel.*

Remember your status. Remember your worth. Remember the Gospel. Amen.