

Studies in Galatians (7/22)

The Blessing and the Curse.

Galatians 3:1-10

The two chapters of Galatians that we have already studied give us sufficient idea of the entire book so that we can wholly take leave of the Galatian brethren, and consider the book as addressed solely to us. The circumstances that called forth the writing of the epistle were that the Galatians, having accepted the Gospel, were led astray by false teachers, who presented to them "another gospel," that is, a counterfeit gospel, since there is but one for all time and for all men. The way it was presented to them was, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye can not be saved." Outward circumcision was given as a sign of righteousness which the individual already possessed by faith. Rom. 4:11. It was a sign that the law was written in the heart by the Spirit, and it was therefore, only a mockery and a sham when the law was transgressed. Rom. 2:25-29. But for one to be circumcised in order to be saved, was to put his trust in works of his own and not in Christ. Now, altho there is in these days no question as to whether or not a man should submit to the specific rite of circumcision in order to be saved, the question of salvation itself, whether by human works or by Christ alone, and vital as ever.

Instead of attacking their error, and combating it with hard argument, the apostle begins with experience, the relation of which illustrates the case in hand. In this narrative, he has occasion to show that salvation is wholly by faith, for all men alike, and not in any degree by works. As Christ tasted death for every man, so every man who is saved must have Christ's personal experience of death and resurrection and life. Christ in the flesh does what the law could not do. Gal. 2:21; Rom. 8:3, 4. But that very fact witnesses to the righteousness of the law. If the law were at fault, Christ would not fulfill its demands. He shows its righteousness by fulfilling, or doing, what it demands, not simply for us, but in us. The grace of God in Christ attests the majesty and holiness of the law. We do not frustrate the grace of God; if righteousness could come by the law, then would Christ be dead in vain. But to claim that the law could be abolished, or could relax its claims, and thus be of no account, is also to say that Christ is dead in vain. Let it be repeated: righteousness can not possibly come by the law, but only by the faith of Christ; but the fact that the righteousness of the law could be attained in no other way by us than by the crucifixion and resurrection and life of Christ in us, shows the infinite greatness and holiness of the law.

The Lesson for the Week

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Gal. 3:1–10.

It may be well to call attention to the fact that the words, “that ye should not obey the truth,” in the first verse, do not appear in the Revised Version. The thought is there, however, and since the same words are used in chapter 5:7, where the Revised Version also has them, we may well take them as they come in the ordinary version. The fact is, as learned in the first chapter, that departure from the Gospel means departure from God. Now God is the God of truth; therefore departure from Him is disobedience to the truth.

The Sin of Witchcraft.—The apostle asks those who are departing from God and His truth, “Who hath bewitched you?” “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” 1 Sam. 15:22, 23. If you look up this text in the Bible, you will see that in both instances the words “is as” are added. The literal Hebrew is, “Rebellion is the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry.” And how so?—Plainly enough, since stubbornness and rebellion are rejection of God; and he who rejects God, puts himself under the control of evil spirits. All idolatry is devil worship. “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils.” 1 Cor. 10:20. There is no middle ground. Christ says, “He that is not with Me is against Me.” Matt. 12:30. That is, disobedience, rejection of the Lord, is the spirit of antichrist.

The Safeguard against Spiritualism.—Spiritualism is only another name for ancient witchcraft and soothsaying. It is a fraud, but not the kind of fraud that most people think it is. There is reality in it. It is a fraud in that, while it professes to receive communications from the spirits of the dead, it has communication only with the spirits of devils, since “the dead know not anything.” To be a Spiritualist medium is to give one’s self to the possession of demons. Now there is only one protection against this, and that is to hold fast to the Word of God. He who lightly regards God’s Word, severs himself from association with God, and

puts himself within Satan's influence. Even tho a man denounce Spiritualism in the strongest terms, if he does not hold to God's Word, he will sooner or later be carried away by the strong delusion. Only by keeping the Word of Christ's patience can men be kept from the temptation that is coming on all the world. Rev. 3:10. "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), is the spirit of Satan,—the spirit of antichrist,—and the Gospel of Christ, which reveals the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:16, 17), is the only possible salvation from it.

Christ Visibly Crucified.—"Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified" before their eyes, said the apostle Paul, and he knew, for he first preached to them. But the experience of the Galatians was not peculiar to them. The cross of Christ is a present thing. The expression, "Come to the cross, is not a mere empty formula, but an invitation that can be literally complied with. Not until one has seen Christ crucified before his eyes, and until he can see the cross of Christ wherever he goes, does one know the reality of the Gospel. Let those scoff at this who will; the fact that a blind man can not see the sun, and denies that it shines, will not frighten any one who sees from talking about its glory. Our next lesson will deal more fully with this matter of the cross in all creation. But, accepting the fact on the apostle's testimony, is it not marvelous that those who had seen and accepted Christ crucified for them, could turn away from Him, to trust in their own works for salvation? Could it be anything less than witchcraft that could produce such a result?

Hold Fast the Beginning.—"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" Foolish is but a feeble term for it. The man who has not power to begin a work, has strength to finish it! Impossible. Who has power to beget himself?—No one; we come into this world without having begotten ourselves; we are born without strength; and, therefore, all the strength that ever manifests itself in us, comes from another than ourselves. It is all given to us. The new-born babe is the representative of man. "A man is born into the world." All the strength that any man has of himself is found in the infant as it utters its first cry with its first breath. Even so in things spiritual. "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth." James 1:18. We can no more live righteous lives by our own strength than we could beget ourselves. The work that is begun by the Spirit, must be carried to completion by the Spirit. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." Heb. 3:14. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6. And He alone can do it.

Experience in the Gospel.—"Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" These questions show that the experience of the Galatian brethren had been as deep and as real as would be expected from

those before whose eyes Christ was openly crucified. The Spirit had been given to them, miracles had been wrought among them, and even by them, for the gifts of the Spirit accompany the gift of the Spirit; and as the result of this living Gospel among them, they had suffered persecution; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3:12. This makes the case the more serious. Having shared the sufferings of Christ, they were now departing from Him; and this departure from Christ, through whom alone righteousness can come, was marked by disobedience to the law of truth. They were insensibly but inevitably transgressing the law to which they were looking for salvation.

"Children of Abraham."—The questions asked in verses 3, 4, and 5 suggest their own answer. The Spirit was ministered, and miracles were wrought, not by works of law, but by "the hearing of faith," that is, by the obedience of faith, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Rom. 10:17. Thus Paul's labor, and the first experience of the Galatians, were exactly in line with the experience of Abraham, whose faith was accounted for righteousness. Let it be remembered that the "false brethren" who preached "another gospel," even the false gospel of righteousness by works, were Jews, and claimed Abraham for their father. It would be their boast that they were children of Abraham, and they would appeal to their circumcision as proof of the fact. But the very thing upon which they relied as proving them to be children of Abraham, was proof that they were not; for "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Abraham had the righteousness of faith before he was circumcised. Rom. 4:11. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Abraham was not justified by works (Rom. 4:2, 3), but his faith "wrought righteousness."

The Gospel to the Gentiles.—"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham." This verse will bear much reading. An understanding of it will guard one against many errors. And it is not difficult to understand; simply hold to what it says, and you have it.

For one thing, the verse shows us that the Gospel was preached at least as early as the days of Abraham. And it was God Himself who preached it; therefore it was the true and only Gospel. It was the same Gospel that Paul preached; so that we have no other Gospel than that which Abraham had. The Gospel differs in no particular now from what it was in Abraham's day; for his day was the day of Christ. John 8:56. God requires just the same things now that He required then, and nothing more.

Moreover, the Gospel was then preached to the Gentiles, for Abraham was a Gentile, or, in other words, a heathen. He was brought up as a heathen, (Joshua 24:2), and was one till the Gospel was preached to him. So the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles was no new thing in the days of Peter and Paul. The Jewish nation was taken out from among the

heathen, and it is only by the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen that Israel is built up and saved. See Acts 15:14-18; Rom. 11:25, 26. Thus we see that the apostle takes the Galatians, and us, back to the fountain-head,—to the place where God Himself preaches the Gospel to us Gentiles. No Gentile can hope to be saved in any other way or by any other gospel than that by which Abraham was saved.

The Blessing of Abraham.—The Gospel was summed up to Abraham in these words: "In thee shall all nations be blessed." It should be stated here that the two words "heathen" ("Gentiles," in R.V.) and "nations," in verse 8, come from the same word in the Greek. In both the Hebrew and the Greek "the heathen" and "the nations" are the same. Now the blessing of Abraham was the blessing of sins forgiven, and of righteousness by faith. See Romans 4:6-11. And this faith was personal faith in Christ crucified and risen, as we learn from Acts 3:25, 26. "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." "All nations" are included in this blessing; hence we are again brought to the fact that there is no gospel for any people under heaven except the Gospel that was preached to Abraham. See Acts 4:12. The blessing comes to all, but is not accepted by all.

"They Which Be of Faith."—These are "blessed with faithful Abraham." That blessing is that their sins are forgiven, and the Lord "will not impute sin" to them. "Sin is the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:4. So, then, the Lord will not impute transgression of the law to those who are of faith. But the Lord will deal justly, and will tell the truth; therefore, when the Lord does not impute sin to anybody, that shows that he has no sin, or, in other words, he is not a transgressor of the law, and if not a transgressor of the law, then he is a keeper of the law. Here, again, we come back to the point that justification by faith means nothing else than being made righteous, or doers of the law, by faith. The blessing is "in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

A Contrast: Under the Curse.—Note the sharp contrast in verses 9 and 10. "They which be of faith are blessed," but "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Faith brings the blessing; works bring the curse, or, rather, leave one under the curse. The curse is on all, for "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." John 3:18. Faith removes the curse. Who are under the curse?—"As many as are of the works of the law." Note that it does not say that those who do the law are under the curse, for that would be a contradiction of Rev. 22:14: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in

the law of the Lord." Ps. 119:1. So, then, they that are of faith are keepers of the law; for they that are of faith are blessed, and those who do the commandments are blessed. By faith they do the commandments. The Gospel is contrary to human nature, and so it is that we become doers of the law, not by doing it, but by believing. "The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a Stumbling-stone and Rock of Offense; and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." Rom. 9:30-33.

What the Curse Is.—No one can read Gal. 3:10 carefully and thoughtfully without seeing that the curse is transgression of the law. Disobedience to God's law is itself the curse; for "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Rom. 5:12. Sin has death wrapped up in it. Without sin death would be impossible, for "the sting of death is sin." 1 Cor. 15:56. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Why? Is it because the law is a curse?—Not by any means. Why then?—Because it is written, "Cursed is every one that *continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*" Mark it well: They are not cursed because they do the law, but because they do not do it. So, then, we see that being of the works of the law does not mean that one is doing the law. No; "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7. All are under the curse, and he who thinks to get out by his own works, remains there. The curse consists in not continuing in all things that are written in the law; therefore the blessing means perfect conformity to the law. This is as plain as language can make it.

Blessing and Cursing.—"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods." Deut. 11:26-28. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him; for He is thy life." Deut. 30:19, 20.

What It Means to Us.—Have you fully grasped the meaning of all this? Do you see what it means to us? Do you realize what the blessing of the Lord is? It is righteousness, perfect harmony with God's perfect law. This is the blessing of Abraham, which he obtained through faith in Christ, and which is offered to all men of all nations. Freedom from sin! "Not by

works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves" (Titus 3:5, R.V.), but by the "works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Backslider or sinner of the world, whoever you are, this means you. You have desired to do right, to "live a better life," but you have not been able. Well, there is One, and only One, who can live that better life, and that is Christ. He can impart to you the blessing of obedience of righteousness. "He is thy life;" therefore take Him, submit to Him, and He will live in you that blessed life that will make you a blessing.

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