

GALATIANS

Lesson 8

The Two Alternatives Galatians 3:10-14

INTRODUCTION

There are people who are not Christians who are kind, gracious, loving, servants to others, humanitarians and generally just good people. It makes it even more difficult when these people say they believe in God but not the God of scripture.

The Bible says that as good as these people may seem to be they are under a curse (1 Cor. 16:22: **“If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him”**). Why would God curse seemingly good people? Surely the world is a better place with men and women who seem to be doing good than with those who are being bad. Why a curse?

The Bible does not deny that non-Christians do good works, but these good works will in no way make them acceptable to God. The Bible teaches that salvation by the works of the law, and salvation by grace through faith in Christ, are two completely different systems. They are antagonistic to one another and lead to different ends. Salvation by works leads to eternal judgment and salvation by grace through faith in Christ leads to eternal life.

It is very difficult for people to think in terms of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, for everything people do is related to works and human effort. It is perfectly natural for folks to believe in the merit system for salvation. Men work to eat and support their families. People work to make good impressions upon others. They work to do well in school. They work to excel in some particular skill like athletics, art or music. All men understand work and the keeping of the law of work is natural and normal to them.

However, in the spiritual realm, people have to shift gears. The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, apart from any human works, acts or merits. Salvation is by grace because God gives it as a free gift to men. It is through faith because all a person can do is receive the gift from God.

Humanly speaking, we are taught to distrust anything that is free. If we see an advertisement which says that something is going to be given away free of charge, we know that there must be some gimmick involved, for men simply do not get something for nothing. When we tell people that salvation is a gift from God and they can do nothing for it but receive Christ through faith, they often say, “Come now, you are putting me on. God or no one else gives us something for nothing. We have to do something for salvation. Surely there is a gimmick somewhere? Absolutely not, there is no gimmick, because salvation has been, is, and always will be, a free gift from God to all who receive Christ.

In Galatians 3:10-14, the Apostle Paul’s whole point is that salvation is not by any law-works but is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. To work for salvation is to totally misunderstand the Biblical teaching on salvation.

THE WAY OF LAW-WORKS 3:10-12

“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the law.’”

Paul was fighting the false teaching of the Judaizers who said that in order to be saved a person had to keep the Mosaic Law and do good works to be accepted before God. They were adamant about keeping the law. Paul pronounced a curse upon all who were trying to keep the law to obtain or attain salvation, and he quoted from the Old Testament to prove his point (Deut. 27:26 **“Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.”**).

The Mosaic Law does not give eternal life but it condemns men and shows them that they are really sinners and in need of a Savior. God’s holy standard is in the law and He expects the requirements of the law to be met. The law demands perfection and no human being can keep the law, for those who continue in the sphere of the law are under the curse. The law does not save but it condemns, and if we are going to keep the law for salvation, then we must keep the law perfectly (James 2:10 **“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”**). To try to keep the law brings one into deeper debt spiritually and places him under the law as a condemned sinner (Rom 4:4 **“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.”**).

All human beings are lawless, for they have neither loved God with all their being or loved their neighbor perfectly as themselves, which is the essence of the Mosaic Law (Matt. 22:37-40 **“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments’**”).

What man could ever say he has never coveted or spoken evilly against another person, or never disobeyed his parents, or never lied? No man! Every human being has broken the law somehow and the law shows he is a sinner, and if a sinner, then he stands under the judgment of a holy and just God. We see, then, that the law does not bring life but it brings condemnation and death.

In my first pastorate, I ministered mostly to farmers. One time I went into this old farmer’s house in order to talk to him about his personal relationship with Christ. I explained the whole gospel to him in detail. When I finished, he pointed to the wall and hanging on the wall was a framed picture containing the Ten Commandments. He said, “See those laws, son, they are all we have to do if we are going to get to heaven. If we try to keep the Ten Commandments, God will accept us.” I then asked him if he kept the law and he said he did the best he could, but admitted sometimes he failed. He could not see that the law actually condemned because he was so blinded by his own self-righteousness and good works. Here was a sincere man, but he was sincerely wrong about the Mosaic Law being the way to heaven.

“Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

The Apostle Paul said that it is obvious that no person can be justified or declared righteous by the Mosaic Law or any other kind of law that men may set up. No one can keep any kind of law perfectly for he either breaks it by acts or in the mind.

The Old Testament is again quoted to show that men are actually justified by faith and not by law-works (Habakkuk 2:4 **“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith.”**). Salvation by grace through faith is a teaching in both the Old and New Testaments. The “righteous” or “just” speaks of those who have been declared righteous in Christ, giving them a perfect position before God. The “righteous” are those who have a legal rather than an ethical relationship to God; it refers to one’s standing rather than character. This should be translated, “The righteous by faith will live.” Those who trust Christ for salvation will have spiritual, eternal life. Why? Because they have exercised faith in Christ and have given up any trust in works to save them.

“The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’”

Again Paul quotes from the Old Testament to make his point (Lev. 18:5 **“Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them.”**). Notice how Paul’s authority for his arguments come from scripture and not human reasoning or logic.

His point is that if a person could keep the law, he could have acceptance with God, but he cannot because he has a sin nature and always breaks the law, proving himself to be a sinner. To get acceptance before God on the basis of law, a person would have to keep the law perfectly, and no one has ever done that—except Jesus Christ.

THE WAY OF FAITH 3:13-14

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”

All men are under the curse of the law and the only way to escape this curse is not by our works but through the work of Christ for sinners. Christ, who kept the law perfectly, was made a curse for sinful men in His death. The curse of the law against good works for salvation was laid squarely on Christ and in His death He bore the curse for us. Christ was never under the curse because He never sinned. However because we have sinned we are under the curse and only Christ can take away that curse (2 Cor. 5:21 **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”**).

Again Paul appeals to the Old Testament (Deut. 21:22-23 **“If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”**). Every criminal sentenced to death and executed under Mosaic Law was then fixed to a stake or hung on a tree for public display until nightfall. This was a symbol of his rejection by God and the Jewish community. Christ was nailed to a cross, which was equivalent to being hanged on a tree. He died under a divine curse, not His curse but our curse. Christ in His death redeemed men from the curse of the law. The word “redeem” means “to purchase out of sin and to set free.” Christ redeemed sinners, ransomed them and set them free from the awful condition of bondage to which the curse of the law had brought them. In His death Christ accomplished a great work for sinful men.

God curses our human works because of the requirements of God’s law. The requirements of the law, however, were met perfectly by Christ in His death. Because Christians are in spiritual union with Christ, the righteous requirements of the law are also fulfilled in the Christian. As far as God is concerned, all who believe in Christ have fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law (Rom 8:3-4 **“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”**).

“He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

Christ went to the cross so that even Gentiles who are under the curse of the law might be delivered from sin and hell. The “blessing of Abraham” is the promise of justification. God promises that a man can be given a righteous standing before God, not by works, but through faith in Jesus Christ. When a person trusts Christ as Savior and Lord, two things happen: (1) he is declared righteous before God; and (2) he receives the Holy Spirit.

Since we are not saved by works, what is the guarantee that a Christian will produce good works as the result of salvation? Every Christian receives the Holy Spirit who begins to do a spiritual work in the person so as to convict of sin and create a desire for godly living. Every truly saved person will produce good works to some degree.

Notice carefully that the blessing of justification and the Holy Spirit are not for everyone but they are for all those who are in Christ. Not everyone is redeemed from the curse of the law, but those who are

in Christ are redeemed. It was in Christ that God acted to secure a man's salvation, and so a man must be in Christ to receive it.

The way a person gets into Christ is through faith. You may be asking yourself, "Did Christ provide for my redemption at the Cross?" My friend, the death of Christ is sufficient for all men, but it is efficient to those who believe. Christ will not turn away one person who trusts the Savior, and He will redeem that person from the curse of the law. Those who trust Christ will come to understand that Christ died for their sins to declare them righteous before God and to redeem them from the curse of the law.

A very subtle way Christians may teach law-works is to their children. Some actually believe they can educate their children to be Christians. We raise our children to pray, to believe Jesus, to obey God's commands, to tell people about Jesus, to give money, to attend church and to keep the moral law of God. This is not wrong. We should do this out of obedience to God, but this is not salvation. Many times when our children get older they know what a Christian is to do but are not Christian themselves. Consequently they either rebel or go on believing they are Christians because they do certain things, but have never really been saved supernaturally by grace through faith in Christ. Parents must teach their children spiritual truths, but they can never settle for thinking that because their kids do certain Christian things (usually to please parents or others) that they are Christians. God must do a supernatural work in our kids so that they have a relationship with Christ and work as a result of having been saved, and not working to get saved or to stay saved.

CONCLUSION

For you here today without Christ, I want you to understand that there are just two alternatives before you. Salvation by works or salvation by faith in Christ. These are two distinct roads or ways. The way of salvation by works leads to the ultimate end of condemnation and spiritual death. The way of salvation by faith in Christ alone leads to acceptance before God and eternal life. If you choose to travel the road of faith in Christ, you will receive God's blessing of justification and the Holy Spirit. If you choose to travel the road of law-works, you are under the curse of God and will be rejected.

Remember, the road of law-works is a dead-end street; there is neither justification or life in that way. The road of faith in Jesus Christ is a never-ending freeway that takes you all the way to heaven (John 14:6 "**Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'**").

Will you trust in your own works and die spiritually or will you trust in the work of Jesus Christ for you and live? This is the most important decision you will ever make in your life, for your eternal destiny hangs on it.