

13. The Book of Galatians 3:5-9 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 12

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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We are studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—going through the book topically based on its main theme which is the liberty that is ours in Christ.

In our study we have entered into the second major section - “**Liberty from Law**” - which is really liberty from *religion and legalism* as a way of being made righteous in God’s eyes.

II. Liberty from Law—verses 1:1-4:31

Under this main point, we are currently entering into a section where Paul is telling us that far from being a blessing in people’s lives who seek to live under the Law for righteousness—the Law brings a curse.

E. The curse of the law— verses 3:10-14

Galatians 3:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*” ¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “*the just shall live by faith.*” ¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but “*the man who does them shall live by them.*”

Remember the context—Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians in large part to correct the false teaching of the Judaizers. The Judaizers were going around telling people that salvation was a mixture of Judaism and Christianity—of law and grace—of works plus faith.

When Paul talks about the ‘works of the law’ in verse 10—he’s speaking of the law given by God to Israel under Moses.

- Under the Mosaic Covenant God gave Israel **613 laws** that they had to keep if they wanted to have fellowship with Him.
- The law was a **temporary ‘fix’** to the problem of their sin—a temporary covering until the time came for the New Covenant to be established thru Jesus at which time their sins (and everyone else’s who put their faith in God’s Messiah) would be taken away once and for all.

However, even though God never intended the law to make them righteous but simply to show them their sinfulness and their need to embrace the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33)—**nevertheless the Jews came to believe that the law could be kept for righteousness.**

So, Paul is addressing this in his letter to the Galatians (and Romans)—where **he is telling them that if they seek to live under the law for righteousness—far from being a blessing, the law becomes a curse.**

It becomes a curse first of all, because **the law can't bestow righteousness on those who keep it—it can only condemn the person who breaks it.** Secondly the law becomes a curse to anyone who tries to use it for righteousness—because it makes salvation dependent upon a person keeping all of it without fail.

1. **The law can't bestow righteousness on those who keep it—it can only condemn the person who breaks it.**

Let me use this illustration to make this point.

Imagine you kept the law in your town perfectly your whole life—you were never once in violation of it—you were a model citizen.

But then one day you decided you were tired of being a 'goody two-shoes' and wanted to know what it was like to be a 'bad-boy' for a change—so you stole a car and went for a joy ride...and when you got caught and you stood before the judge, here's what you said in your defense—

"Your honor, I know I broke the law, but this was the only time I've ever broken it—surely all the times I kept the law should erase this one violation of the law!" To which the judge responds, *"You don't get any points for keeping the law—that's what's required of you! **But if you break the law, you are guilty and worthy of punishment.**"*

2. **The law requires perfect obedience if a person is going to use it to be righteous in God's eyes.**

When it comes to keeping the law perfectly so as to earn heaven—Paul said:

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The word 'sin' is a Greek word that literally means *"to miss the mark"*—the mark being *"the glory of God"* or **sinless perfection**. So, in that regard we've all missed the mark and have fallen short of sinless perfection—and as Paul went on to say in Romans 6:23, **the penalty for all sin is eternal punishment in hell.**

Now at this point, those who have put their faith in the law (think 'religion') for righteousness (this applies to any religious system that a person looks to, to make them righteous in God's eyes)—at this point the religious among us would no doubt say that **"Yes I've broken God's laws, but I can still make up for it by doing more 'good things' than the bad things I have done in the way of sin."**

Folks, **that is the lie of religion—that if I work really hard and do enough 'good', I can erase the bad (sin) I have done and be good enough to make it into heaven someday.**

>>> I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) where we were taught that religious practices and observances like—going to mass, lighting candles, keeping holy days, praying the rosary, abstaining from certain foods during lent and other **acts of 'piety'**—would earn us a place in heaven.

>>> For centuries the RCC has taught (and still teaches) that **we must punish ourselves** as a way of paying for our sins and lessening our time in purgatory (which does not exist).

So faithful Catholics in some parts of the world during 'Passion Week' (the week after next) walk barefoot on roads containing sharp rocks while flagellating themselves with whips until their feet and backs are raw and bloody.

They do this as a way of earning God's favor and meriting heaven (like Roman Catholics living in the Philippines who even conduct mock crucifixions to atone for their sins). **This is an absolute blasphemy against the completed work of Jesus Christ Who said from the cross - "It is finished!"**

REFLECTION: Can you think of some "works" different religious groups may incorporate into their ministries in order to achieve God's love and acceptance of them?

Listen to the words of Isaiah on the subject:

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Paul makes a definitive statement on the subject when he said in Galatians 2:21

"If human works, rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices etc. could save us—then Christ died in vain!"

Paul went on to say that living under the law will not save you; only faith in God's promise can do that.

Galatians 3:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for *"the just shall live by faith."* ¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but *"the man who does them shall live by them."*

In verse 11 Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4—a verse so critical to his defense of the doctrine of justification by faith that he repeats it four times in the New Testament (twice in Romans, once Galatians, and Hebrews) and is always stated in response to those who are still trying to live under a system of works instead of grace for righteousness.

>>> By the way—this was the statement that broke Martin Luther of his effort to save himself through his good works and brought him to true righteousness by faith alone.

In verse 12 Paul is saying: *"Law and grace are mutually exclusive. It's either one or the other but it can't be both—so which one is it?"* (Romans 4)

Let me paraphrase what Paul is saying in this section - *“Anyone who seeks to get to heaven by keeping religious laws, rituals and works—will not be blessed (in heaven someday) but will be cursed (sent to hell forever).”*

In the Old Testament, God’s law contained 613 commandments—to break anyone of them was to miss the mark (sin) and to be guilty before God. But let’s not deal with all 613, let’s just limit ourselves to the ten we are most familiar with—**the Ten Commandments.**

REFLECTION: Can you list the Ten Commandments? (If you can’t then you can see how hard it would be to keep perfectly the commandments God gave His people and needless to say the 613 laws in the Old Testament.)

In that regard, being *good* in the eyes of God means hitting the ‘mark’ (sinless perfection) all day, every day—it’s **keeping perfectly all the Ten Commandments of God your entire life without fail!** These commandments are like the wooden boards that make up the hull of a ship—it doesn’t matter if most of them are there—if only one is broken that ship is going down!

The same is true for the person who tries to get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments.

It doesn’t matter if they keep *most* of them—if any commandment is broken even once—that person is sunk (condemned). James said—*“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point (break only one of God’s commandments), he is guilty of violating them all.”* (2:10)

This is why Paul calls the law a curse—it’s because it makes salvation dependent upon a person keeping all of it without fail—Or in other words, the law demands moral perfection from a person to gain access into heaven. Yet when I ask people, *“If you were to die tonight would God let you into heaven?”*—they almost always tell me, *“Yes!”*

>>> When I ask them to explain why they respond, *“Because I’m a good person. I know I’m not perfect (morally speaking), but I still think I’m good enough to get into heaven.”*

Listen to what God’s Word is saying—If you’re *not* morally perfect you’re *not good enough* to get into heaven! That’s why Jesus said to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 (a very moral and religious person) - *“No one is good but God”* because God defines “good” as moral perfection.

Fallen man defines goodness as simply being better than others—and since we can always find someone worse than we are to compare ourselves to—we think we’re good! But they aren’t the standard—**Jesus is the standard—and He’s perfect!**

This means there is no *“I think I’m good enough”* or *“I’m better than most...”* argument that will get a person into heaven—it’s either sinless perfection or eternal rejection (hell)!

Again, Paul the apostle in Romans 3:23 said, “For all have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God (sinless perfection and heaven)” and in Romans 6:23 he said and, “the wages of sin is death (eternal death in hell)” Romans 6:23a.

You see, the bad news for religious folks, is that God only lets *perfect* people into heaven—the good news is that anyone who receives Jesus into their heart as Savior is pronounced perfect (‘positionally’) by God and given the gift of eternal life in heaven—because I am now in Christ and God no longer sees me, He sees only Jesus.

REFLECTION: What’s wrong with one thinking you’re a good person overall, good character and good morals and believe they are going to be admitted to heaven?

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³ ...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Galatians 3:13–14 (NKJV)

¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law...” (verse 13)

The word ‘redeemed’ in verse 13 means to “purchase a slave for the purpose of setting him free”.
Jesus, by shedding His blood on the cross, purchased us (redeemed us)
that we might be set free from the curse of the Law.

The curse of the law is death (the penalty for breaking its commandments)—Jesus has delivered those under law from paying the penalty of death demanded by the law—

Colossians 2:13–14 (NLT)

¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

“The blessing of Abraham” (justification by faith and the gift of the Spirit) is now ours through faith in Jesus Christ—

Galatians 3:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

“...that we (all) might receive...” (verse 14)

Jesus redeemed the people of this world by dying in their place which meant the curse of God (His penalty for breaking His law) fell on Jesus as man’s Substitute (penal substitution).

Understand, when Jesus hung on the cross, He did not become sinful in Himself—but man’s sins were placed upon Him and He died for those who were guilty sinners—

“He who knew no sin became sin for us (the punishment for our sins) that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

REFLECTION: How might you define “redeemed”?

The New Testament is clear that without the shedding of Jesus’ blood (the perfect, sinless, Lamb of God) there could be no forgiveness—apart from His death there could be no salvation:

Hebrews 9:22 (NLT)

²² ... For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Leviticus 17:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.’

In verse 13 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 - *“He that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God.”*

One commentator said—

“The Jews did not crucify criminals—they stoned them to death. But in cases of extreme violation against the Law, the body was hung on a tree and exposed for all to see. The law taught that when condemned criminals were hanged on a tree, it was a sign of their being under the curse of God (Deut. 21:23). Of course, Peter’s reference to a “tree” (Acts 5:30; 1 Peter 2:24) relates to the cross on which Jesus died. Jesus was not stoned and then His dead body exposed; He was nailed alive to a tree and left there to die. But by dying on the cross, Jesus Christ bore the curse of the Law for us; so that now the believer is no longer under the Law and its awful curse.”

“...that we (all) might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (verse 14)

F. The covenant of promise—verses 15-18

Paul uses the word “**promise**” 8 times in the last 15 verses of Galatians 3.

This is critical to his argument that eternal life is a gift that God has promised to us through our faith and not something we earn by our works.

REFLECTION: Why do you think Paul uses the word “**promise**” over other words such as commitment, agreement, arrangement, assurance, commitment, etc.?

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