

Commentary on Galatians 3, by Chuck Smith 1.21.24

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January verse **Luke 24:45 (NKJV)** And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

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Galatians chapter three. Background: Paul the apostle had been in the area of Galatia. Galatia was a general area like a county or a state. It was not a city. There were many churches established there. After Paul's departure, other teachers came in declaring that the people could not be saved by a simple faith in Jesus Christ, but must also to that faith add the obedience to the law and the rituals of the law of circumcision. And many of the people in those churches that were brought to the gospel of Jesus Christ through Paul's preaching were taken in by these other teachers that followed Paul, and so a division developed among the brethren there in that area.

These false teachers that had come in had spoken against Paul's authority as an apostle. And they were actually advocating the necessity of following the laws of Judaism in order to be saved. Keeping of the law and a righteousness which is predicated upon following or observing these particular rules. So, Paul at the end of chapter two said, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" ([Galatians 2:21](#)). Great powerful words, but very true words.

You see, if I could become righteous by keeping a set of rules, then Jesus would not have to die. The fact that Jesus did die declares that no man can be righteous by his own effort or by his own works. God has established a basis for righteousness, but it is not upon works; it's not upon obedience to the law, but it is upon our faith in Jesus Christ. So Paul then opens chapter three,

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? ([Gal 3:1-3](#))

So, Paul takes them back to the very beginning of their salvation, when they first believed in Jesus Christ, and through their faith in Jesus Christ were accounted righteous before God, before they had done any works at all, God accounted them righteous. Now someone has come along and said, "If you want to really be righteous, then you can't be doing that. If you want to really be righteous, then you've got to be doing this." And they started establishing sort of rules for

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righteousness, which we are so often prone to do. Now, if you will read ten chapters of the Bible every day, and read a morning devotional, and spend a half hour in prayer, surely you will be much more righteous than the person who doesn't do those things. You see, we're prone to put on that kind of an addition to a person's faith.

"By the works of the law, no flesh can be justified" in the eyes of God ([Galatians 2:16](#)). If we could become righteous by obeying the law, any law, any set of rules, then Christ is dead in vain. And so the Galatians were taken in. They were bewitched by the teaching. It sounded so reasonable. But Paul then said, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" Now it's a rhetorical question, because the obvious answer is that they received the Spirit by faith. Now, this epistle to the Galatians is important, because there is, it seems, even to the present time, a great tendency to turn towards works as a basis of my relationship with God. And that's always a dangerous basis for your relationship with God, because our works are not always approved, even by ourselves.

Paul's question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith, or by the works of the law?" The answer is obviously: you received the Holy Spirit by faith; it's God's gift. You can't deserve it. You can't be worthy of it. And that was the whole context behind the tarrying; it was a cleansing process where you'll become worthy. My body worthy to be the temple of the Holy Spirit? Never, no way. I received the Spirit by the hearing of faith.

Now the next question: "Foolish Galatians, having begun in the Spirit." That's where you start with...you started out in the Spirit, now are you going to be made perfect in your flesh? Are you going to improve upon God's work in your life? And how many times we're trying to improve on our righteousness by works, by obedience, by promising to God, making covenants with God. Promising, "Now, God, I promise this next week I am going to faithfully pray one hour everyday. I promise You, Lord, I'm going to. Now, Lord, on the basis of that promise, I want You to bless me. You know, because after all, I'm going to be so righteous by the end of the week having prayed an hour every day." And having begun in the Spirit, we so often are seeking to be made perfect in the flesh, by our fleshly efforts. Paul is rebuking the Galatians for this false concept.

Have ye suffered [he said] 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? ([Gal 3:4-5](#))

Again, this creates some problems many times, because there are those that are going around with what they call miracle ministries. And you know, they advertise, "Come and see miracles." And, "Miracles every Monday night," you know. As though God were limited to, you know, "Why, I came Sunday night." "No, no, no, this isn't miracle night yet, come back tomorrow night for the miracles."

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Now it has created a problem, because many of these miracle evangelists have deep personal problems. Yet they stand up before a great number of people, and there **seems** to be miracles wrought through their ministry.

You see, God does not reward us for our works, for our efforts, for our goodness. Whatever God gives to me, He gives to me on the basis of my believing in His grace. And these men have learned to believe in the grace of God. Not really looking at their own selves, weaknesses, failures or whatever, and they have learned how to inspire people to look to God through faith. And God honors the faith of the people who have come to receive from God.

Any work that God has done in my life comes to me by believing, faith in Jesus Christ and in the grace of God. Now, when you can really assimilate that truth, then you can start to expect God to bless you, though you know that you don't deserve the blessings, because I'm not coming on what I deserve. If I got what I deserved, man, I'd be frying by now. He has not rewarded us according to our iniquities, but "as high as the heaven is above the earth, so high is God's mercy towards them that fear Him" ([Psalm 103:11](#)).

So I stand in the grace of God. I walk in the grace of God. Now, does that mean then that I can just go out, and you know, live any kind of an old lascivious life? No, no, no, no, no. The love of Christ constrains me to walk a life that is pleasing, and when I use that as the criteria for my activities, I find that I live a more strict life than when I try and use right and wrong as the basis for my particular activity. Is this right to do? Is this wrong to do? I so often hear that question. That should not be the consideration. The consideration should always be, "Is this pleasing to God if I do it?"

You see, a lot of people say, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that." Ooo, but it doesn't please God. So, as I am living to please God, yet I do not look at myself or my imperfections as the basis for my receiving from God. Or, if I happen to have a good day and have been especially benevolent and have done, you know, some extra good deeds, I don't look to those as the basis of my receiving from God. I don't say, "Well, God, did you see that? Did you observe? Lord, didn't I handle that well? Now don't you think, Lord, I deserve a little special credit for that one, you know? Can't You do this for me? Because look what I just did for You." No, God does not reward me for good efforts, or even good performance. God blesses me because He loves me. And He loves for me to just trust in Him. And He loves it when I seek to please Him. But even that is not the basis for what God gives to me. The basis is God's love and grace for me. He bestows upon me His blessings, His love, as I simply believe in Him to do it and trust Him to do it.

Now, if you are coming to God on the basis of your righteousness, then you're going to be cut short of what God wants to do in your life. You're going to be robbing yourself of many rich blessings that God wants to bestow. But if you come always on

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the basis of God's love and grace for you, then you'll never be cut short. As I am believing and trusting God to bless my life, even though I know I do not deserve it.

As Jacob said, "Lord, I am not worthy the least of thy mercies" ([Genesis 32:10](#)). It isn't my worthiness that counts. Jacob was a scoundrel, and yet God blessed him abundantly, and he knew it. He was a deceiver. He was a conniver. He was a manipulator. And when he looked at God's blessings, "O Lord, I'm not worthy the least of Your mercies, yet you have blessed me."

So, he now enters into this principle coming back to Abraham.

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness ([Gal 3:6](#)).

What? His believing God. Now, it is true that his belief in God was manifested by his obedience to God. It isn't just saying, "Well, I believe in the Lord. I believe in Jesus." It's more than just a verbal assent to the truth. If I indeed believe, my belief will be demonstrated by my actions. If I stood here tonight before you and said, "Friends, I believe there's going to be a violent earthquake in ten minutes that's going to level this building. God's revealed to me that the San Andreas fault line is about ready to, you know, to let go. In fact, in just now, it's actually only nine minutes and forty seconds. This thing is just going to be flattened." And I just went on talking and all, you can say, "He really doesn't believe that." Why? Because my actions are not consistent with what I am saying. You see, if I really believed that, I'd say, "Hey, let's get out of here. You know, get out there under the trees or get out there in the yard, because, you know, these buildings are going to be flat. And go get your kids, get them out of the buildings quick! You know, and let's get moving."

Now, if a person just says, "Hey, I believe in Jesus. Yeah, I believe." And yet their actions are not in conformity with what they are declaring, then there is a great reason to doubt whether or not they sincerely or really believe it. If I sincerely really believe something, then my actions are going to be conformed with and confirming that which I believe.

So, Abraham's actions confirmed what he believed. His actions were on the basis on what he believed. Abraham believed God, and it was the belief that God accounted for righteousness, not the actions, but the belief that prompted the actions. As James said, "Faith without works is dead" ([James 2:26](#)). "You say you believe? Well, you show me your works and I'll show you your faith." In other words, James is pointing out that just verbal assent to truth is not enough. It has to be demonstrated by your action if it is a true faith, if it is a true belief. But God doesn't look to the actions, but He looks to the faith which prompts the actions. With Abraham, it was Abraham's faith that God accounted for righteousness.

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Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham ([Gal 3:7](#)).

So, Abraham was the father, not of a physical race, but of a spiritual race. The promises to Abraham were not to the physical seed, but to the spiritual seed. So that Paul will soon point out that we as children of Abraham, who is the father of those that believe, and by your believing, you then become a child of Abraham through faith. And thus, the covenant that God made with Abraham become God's covenant with you, as you become a child of Abraham, the father of those who believe. So, you may be a physical descendant of Abraham, but if you don't believe, you're not really a descendant of Abraham in that spiritual sense.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [or the Gentiles] 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 ([Gal 3:8-9](#)).

The promise of God to Abraham, foreseeing that the Gentiles were going to be justified through faith, promised him this blessing of which you become partaker.

Now, those who were ready to go back to the law, those that were ready to look to the law as the basis for a righteous standing before God, Paul said, "Don't you realize that,"

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 3:10](#)).

Heavy duty. You want to be made righteous before God by your keeping the law? Then you've got to keep the whole law all the time, and if you ever violate it once in any area, you've had it. You're under the curse. For "cursed is the man that continueth not in the whole law to do all of the things that are written therein."

James said that "if we keep the whole law, and yet violate in one point, we are guilty of all" ([James 2:10](#)). Now, it doesn't make any difference which point you violated, if you violate any point of the law, you're guilty of the whole. If you want to be righteous before God by your works, then you've got to be perfect. And if you're not perfect, you better listen then to the gospel of grace through faith, because you need it. So this is for imperfect people. The rest of you can go home at that point.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for [the Bible says], The just shall live by faith ([Gal 3:11](#)).

This scripture was given by God to the troubled prophet Habakkuk who was complaining to God at a time of national decline. The nation was going downhill fast.

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All kinds of corruption in government. And Habakkuk saw the corruption that was there. He has insight into the problem and he said, "God, please do me a favor. Don't let me see anything else; I can't take it. The whole system is going down the tubes and you're not doing a thing about it." God said, "Habakkuk, I am doing a work, and if I told you what I was doing, you wouldn't believe me." So Habakkuk said, "Well, try me." And God said, "I am preparing Babylon, and I am going to bring Babylon as my instrument to judge these people for their iniquity." "Wait a minute, Lord, that isn't fair. We're bad, yes, but hey, they're horrible. They're much worse than we. Why would you use a nation that is even more evil to punish us?" God said, "I told you you wouldn't believe it." So Habakkuk said, "Well, Lord, I don't know what to do. I'm just going to go sit in the tower, and I'm just going to wait on You and see what You're going to do."

So, he went into the tower to just sit there and waited on God. And while he was sitting there, the word of the Lord came to Habakkuk the prophet saying, "Habakkuk, the just shall live by faith. Believe me. Just trust in me. Things are going to get tough, Habakkuk. The nation's going to go into captivity, you know, but believe Me, trust in Me, the just shall live by faith."

So, Paul here again quotes this fantastic statement of God: the just, or those that are justified will be justified by faith. That is why the law cannot justify you. It cannot make you righteous.

And the law is not of faith ([Gal 3:12](#)):

The law is of works. The law says,

but, The man that doeth them shall live in them ([Gal 3:12](#)).

But the law places the emphasis upon the doing, the obedience, where faith places the emphasis upon trusting in God. So then, as many as are under the law are under the curse of the law, unless they keep the entire law. But,

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree ([Gal 3:13](#)):

So Jesus, hanging upon the tree, upon the cross, became a curse for us that He might redeem us from the curse of the law. Again, here we have a glorious insight into God's grace towards us in Christ. For "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might know the riches of God" ([2 Corinthians 8:9](#)). I mean, that's quite a deal. Here He was so rich, yet for your sake He emptied Himself. He became poor, that through His poverty you might know the riches of God's love and grace.

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"For God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Many times when we go down to baptize in the ocean, the water is rather cold. And when people are immersed in that cold water, sometimes it sort of takes their breath away. And as they come up, you can see them sort of gasping because of the coldness, you know, just haah, you know, trying to catch composure again. It's a shock when your body is warm to suddenly be immersed in cold water. It's a shock to your body.

I wonder what kind of a shock it must have been to Jesus who was so pure, so totally pure, to all of a sudden have dumped on Him the sins of the world. Every rotten, evil thing that has ever been committed by man. Every perverted thing ever committed by man dumped on Him. What a shock that must have been. But yet, "God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him" ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). So, He redeemed us from the curse of the law, because He became a curse for us through hanging there on the cross.

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ([Gal 3:14](#)).

So Jesus came to redeem, taking our curse. But again, that's negative. Positive: that you might receive the blessings that God promised to Abraham, the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man [can] disannulleth [it], or addeth thereto [to it] ([Gal 3:15](#)).

Now, God made the covenant with Abraham, a blessing. "In blessing I will bless thee" ([Genesis 22:17](#)). God made the promise of His blessing upon Abraham's children. You are the children of Abraham through faith, for he is the father of those that believe. And so, God's promises to you are, "In blessing I will bless you and multiply you." God's promised His blessing upon you through faith. Jesus opened the door that you might receive these blessings that God promised upon Abraham. And by your faith in Jesus Christ, you enter into this covenant.

Now, a covenant, though God made it with man, once God confirmed that covenant, no man can take away from that covenant or no man can add to that covenant. And so,

Now to Abraham and to his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ ([Gal 3:16](#)).

And so when God said, "And through thy seed all of the nations of the earth will be blessed," He wasn't saying that the world is going to be blessed through the Jewish nation. He was saying the world would be blessed through Jesus Christ. Thy seed, singular. It was a reference to Jesus Christ and the work of redemption that He

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would accomplish for man, through which the blessings of God might come upon all the nations of the world. And the Jews so often misinterpret that promise to Abraham thinking that they are to be the benefactors of the blessings to the world. Not so. It is through the seed, singular, Jesus Christ, that these blessings were to come to the Gentiles and to all the world.

And this I say ([Gal 3:17](#)),

Remember, if God has made a covenant, no one can add to it or take away from it. "And this I say,"

that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect ([Gal 3:17](#)).

So, the law came along and pronounced upon man a curse. "Cursed is everyone that continues not in the whole law to do all that is written therein." The law came along and condemned man to death. But God has promised the blessing. And "in blessing I will bless thee." And His blessing upon Abraham's seed, those who would believe. That is, upon his descendants, or those that would follow him in faith. So the law cannot really take away those blessings that God has promised to you, or your failure and obedience to the law cannot destroy or disannul the covenant that God made to bless you.

Now God help us to see this, because it's going to cause your life to become so rich and filled with God's blessing you won't be able to handle it. My life has become so blessed of God, having been brought by the Spirit to the understanding of the basis of God's blessings upon me are all in God, in His grace, in His love for me, and are not dependent upon my works. But they are just predicated upon: God has made a covenant to bless me. God confirmed that covenant, and the law cannot disannul it. My failure cannot disannul it. As I believe in Jesus Christ, I become a son of Abraham through faith, and thus, this covenant that God made with Abraham's children becomes God's covenant with me, and God's covenant was that of total blessings.

Now, the law can't take that away from me. Though the law was added four hundred and thirty years later, once the covenant is confirmed, it cannot be added to or disannulled. It cannot disannul God's covenant of blessing with me because I have failed to keep that law.

Wherefore then serveth the law? ([Gal 3:19](#))

And, of course, it's the opposite. Then why did God give the law? If the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise. Then why did God give the law?

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It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator ([Gal 3:19](#)).

So, the law served because of man's transgressions, to show man his guilt and his need of a Savior.

Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one ([Gal 3:20](#)).

It takes two to have a mediation. Takes two to tango. Two to have a fight. Takes two to have a mediation. Then, so Christ is become the mediator between God and man.

Is the law then against the promises of God? [No] God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith ([Gal 3:21-23](#))

"But before faith came," rather. Before Jesus Christ came, the relationship to God had to be by the law. That's how man related to God. He had to bring the sacrifice; he had to make the covering for his sin. But once Jesus came, we no longer needed the law.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ([Gal 3:24](#)),

Or unto the time of the coming of Christ.

that we might be justified by faith ([Gal 3:24](#)).

The law can only show me how far I have failed to be what God would require me to be. It's the schoolmaster. Man was once under the law unto the time of Christ.

But after that faith is come [Jesus Christ came], we are no longer under a schoolmaster ([Gal 3:25](#)).

Paul said Christ is the end of the law to those that believe. That is, the law as the basis for my relationship with God. My relationship with God is no longer based upon my keeping the law. My relationship with God is now based upon my faith in Jesus Christ.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise ([Gal 3:26-29](#)).

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And so, Jesus has become the common denominator among men. So that we all relate to God on an equal basis through Jesus Christ. I have just as ready an access to God through Jesus Christ as does Billy Graham or the Pope or anybody else, because they have to come the same way. I have to come through Jesus Christ and through faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, sometimes I think I have more access, because I know I have to come through faith, and some of those good people might think that they can come on their own sometimes. But I know I can't.

So you, as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, have access to God, and it doesn't make any difference what your background is. For as far as our being in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female." There is no male superiority. God doesn't listen to men more readily than women. Or, on the other hand, He doesn't listen to women more readily than men. We are all brought to one common denominator in Jesus Christ and we're all one in Him.