

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Salvation Is by Faith Alone**

Scripture: Galatians 3:6-14

Code: 1659

We've been studying the book of Galatians, and if you'll turn to chapter 3, we'll just kind of finish up verses 6-14 which we began a couple of weeks ago. "Men are brought to God by grace," says Paul. That's why, when people are standing up and talking about the change in their life, they give God the glory for it, because it's His work. This is certainly clear in our own testimonies, and it's abundantly clear in Scripture.

We've been talking about, in the book of Galatians, the subject of justification. Justification is a theological word, but it simply means 'to be declared righteous,' or 'to be declared right before God.' All men are born into the world wrong, living in the wrong, living in sin, on the outs with God, at odds with God, at opposite ends from God. There is no way they can have fellowship with God; they have no right to enter the presence of God. They cannot know God; they cannot understand God. Something has to happen to make those people right with God, to allow them to have fellowship with God, to be acceptable with God, to live with God, to have God's life in them, to have God's love, to spend eternity with God. That which makes them right with God is called justification, justifying them.

Now, justification, then, is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error in the doctrine of justification is like a defect in the foundation of a building; everything from there on up is off. The doctrine of justification is the basis of New Testament doctrine for Biblical Christianity.

The word 'justification' comes from the law courts. A person was arraigned before a judge, they were pronounced guilty, unjust. That's true of every man born into the world, they are pronounced, before the bar of God, unjust. What is it that can make a man just in the eyes of God? What is it that can make him righteous or right in the eyes of God? What is it that can, rather than condemning him, excuse him from condemnation? Only one thing: the Bible says, "We are justified freely by his grace." It's all of grace. It's nothing we've done, nothing we've earned, no good works that we did, no religiosity, no going to church, getting baptized, reading the Bible, all kinds of things like that. What justifies a man before God is the freedom of the grace of God on behalf of that man.

Justification is such a marvelous work of God that the whole Trinity is involved in it. I don't know if you've ever thought of it like that, but the entire Trinity is involved in justification. Romans 8:33. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies." So the Father justifies; He is involved in the act of justification. Romans 8:33. In Acts 13:39, "And by him [talking about Christ], all that believe are justified." So Christ is involved in justification. In I Corinthians 6:11, it says, "You are

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, even by the Spirit of our God." So the whole Trinity is involved in the act of justifying the sinner.

You say, "Why does God do this? Couldn't God just look down here and let sinners go on?" Yes. Why does God freely want to forgive? Why does God want to bring someone into the law court and say, "You're guilty! You're guilty! You're guilty, but I'm going to let you go free." Why does He want to do that? It's simple. Ephesians 1:6 says, "He does it to the praise of the glory of his grace." Above all things in the universe, what is it that God wants? Glory. And God gets glory when His attributes are on exhibit. One of the attributes of God is grace, so when God enacts grace, He therefore gains glory, because men see His grace. So God wants to pardon guilty sinners for the purpose of bringing praise to His glory. "That men may praise the glory of his grace."

God wants the angels to see it, too, doesn't He? We saw that in the book of Ephesians, where it says in 3:10 that God has saved men and all of this, "To the intent that the principalities and powers in heavenly places might see the manifold wisdom of God." God wants to display His grace and His wisdom before all. The supreme motive of God, then, in the salvation of men is simply His own glory.

Let me show you an interesting verse. Ephesians 2:7. It says in verse 6 that He saved us, verse 7 says why. "In order that, in the ages to come, he might display the exceeding riches of his grace." God wants to display His attributes! That's His nature, so men have been redeemed in order for God to put His glory on display. God's supreme purpose, then, is to demonstrate before all intelligences, principalities, powers and angels, the exceeding riches of His grace. God wants all those living creatures in all the universe to see the hopelessness of sin, the lostness of man, the transformation of salvation, and the marvelous nature of grace. The very purpose for which the church was called was to display His glory.

There is an interesting little verse in Jude. It says this in verse 24. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." An interesting way to interpret that verse is to assign the joy to God. That God gains exceeding joy when you see His glory. So salvation, then, is for the purpose of giving God glory.

Listen, friends, this is important. Watch. If God saves us to the praise of His glory and all that He does is to bring Him glory, then if you have anything to do with your salvation, what does that do to His glory? It diminishes it that much, doesn't it? Because you did that. If any good work that you ever did, or any act of human merit that you have ever done, at all was involved in your salvation, then part of the glory belongs to you. No, it cannot be. You were saved to the praise of the glory of His grace.

There is no room for human merit, believe me. Romans 3:19. "We know that whatever things the law says, it says to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." There is nothing a man can ever do to bring about his own justification. There is nothing a man can ever do to make himself right with God; it is an absolute impossibility. For that would be to steal the glory of God. In Galatians 3:22, it says right there in our chapter, it says, "The Scripture has concluded all under sin." All men are in sin, hopelessly! "The Scripture concludes that in order that the promise by faith, of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe." God locks all men in sin in order that they might recognize that it is only through His perfect act that anything could ever be done on their behalf.

Romans 11:32. "For God has concluded them all in unbelief [I love this] that He might have mercy upon all." You see, God leaves every man with no answer, no out, no argument, no hope, no nothing, and then offers him a free salvation! Why? Because then, when that man is redeemed, all the glory belongs to whom? To God. If you had anything to do with your salvation by any of the good things that you ever did, then you have stolen the glory of God. God Himself says that, "My glory will I not give to another." All men are sinners, all men are equally sinners, and they're all equally condemned.

John 3:18. "He that believes on Him is not condemned, but he that does not believe is condemned already." Any man who does not believe is condemned. Faith is the only thing that apprehends the free grace of God.

In John 1:16, just to point out a couple of things, it says this. "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." Anybody who is saved is saved because of grace. It's His fullness, it's His grace granted to us. Romans 5:17. "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one [that is, Adam]; much more they who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness," justification, or being right with God, is a gift of grace, you can't earn it. There is no way to earn it. "Where sin abounded, grace abounded more." Grace super-abounded, in the Greek.

So the Apostle Paul, in several places, also in II Corinthians 9:14, says, "And by their prayer for you, who long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Salvation is a gift, a gift of God's grace. There is not one thing you could do to earn it. "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves." It's a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. If it was of works, we'd all boast, wouldn't we? "What did you do to get saved?" "Oh, I did 43 of these spiritual things." "Well, what did you do?" "I didn't do much. God did most of it, but I just threw in a little extra at the end." See? Justification is purely by grace. That's why the book of Galatians was written.

The book of Galatians was written to combat the heresy that you could add works to faith and

therefore make yourself righteous. Or that you could say, "God made me righteous and I just had to do this." Any addition of works diminishes the absolute nature of grace. Paul says in Romans, "If you're going to add works, then grace is no more grace." "I am what I am," said Paul, "By the grace of God and a little help from me." Is that what he said? That would sound ludicrous. "I am what I am by the grace of God, period." Yes.

No, you can't do anything to save yourself. You know what happened in Galatia? Remember? Paul went to Galatia, founded these churches, and Galatia was an area of many cities. Paul founded at least four churches and then the Judaizers came. They were Jews who believed you had to do things to help God out with salvation. God would do a wonderful thing in Christ, and then if you did some spiritual push-ups and took care of the legalism, got yourself circumcised and obeyed the law; you could accompany your faith with works and therefore be saved. They had a works plus faith system that they sold to the Galatians, and the Galatians bought it.

Paul says in Galatians 3:1, "Oh foolish Galatians, who bewitched you?" So he's writing Galatians to answer the heresy that you can get saved by faith plus works. The book is divided simply. In the first two chapters, he defends his apostleship and his authority. You see, the Judaizers had questioned whether he even had a right to speak. He was preaching, "Grace, grace, grace, grace, no more law, no more legalism, no more ritual, no more ceremony." The Judaizers came in and said, "Oh, Paul is a Johnny-come-lately, he wasn't one of the originals, he comes from up north, he doesn't represent the Jerusalem church, he represents the Gentile church. Don't even believe him." So for two chapters, Paul defends his authority.

The second thing the Judaizers did was undermine his doctrine of salvation by grace alone, so in chapters 3-4, he defends that. The third thing the Judaizers did was to undermine his teaching on the life of liberty, so he answers that in chapters 5-6.

We're in chapters 3-4, and here Paul is defending his doctrine of salvation by grace, which is not his, but God's who gave it to him. His approach covers two areas, which we saw last time. He defends the doctrine of salvation by grace on the basis of experience and Scripture. You heard testimonies tonight and, in each case, people talked about what God was doing in their lives (experience) and also made reference to Scripture. Those things go together all throughout the Scripture. You hear Peter say, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty, but we have a more sure word of prophecy, that which is written."

So Scripture and experience go together in Paul's argument. In verses 1-5, he talks to them about their experience. He says, "You've experienced salvation by grace, now what are you going back to the law for? What kind of deal is that? You already know you were saved by faith, by grace alone, what do you need? What are you going to add?" Verse 3. "You began in the spirit, are you going to be made perfect by the flesh? How come, with such a good start, you're going to go backwards? You've already experienced salvation by grace, what else do you need?" Then, moving from

experience, he goes to Scripture in verse 6. So from 3:6 to 4:7, Paul defends the doctrine of salvation by grace on the basis of Old Testament Scripture. This is an exciting thing, because the Judaizers would come in and base their argument on Old Testament Scripture because they were Jews. They believed the Old Testament was still the way to go, still in vogue, so they would defend their argument on the basis of Old Testament Scripture. So Paul just takes Old Testament Scripture and tells them what it really taught. Tremendous.

Well, in his presentation of Scripture in defense of justification by grace through faith, he has two ways to approach it: positive and negative. That's the two points of the outline. Simple. Point one, positive proof; point two, negative proof. Now the positive proof came in verses 6-9, and we saw this last time. Notice the name in verse 6: Abraham. Now Paul uses Abraham as his example. The positive illustration of justification by faith is Abraham.

Remember Abraham lived in a place called Ur, which was over where Babylon used to be, in the middle of Mesopotamia. It was by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, going east from Israel toward India, toward the Far East. And here lived Abraham, who wasn't too old at that time, and he was a typical, run-of-the-mill pagan, except he was probably just a little bit better than most. God comes to him and says, "Abraham, get thee up and get thee out unto a land I will show you. I'm not going to tell you what it is or what I've got in mind. Just go." And he did. It's amazing faith. So he gets over there, and God says to him, "Now you're going to have a baby." And he believed God. So Abraham became the pattern for faith, a man who believed God. Genesis says, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness."

Notice, Paul uses Abraham in verse 6 just to show that. "Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Paul is saying this, "Hey, you people. You can go clear back to Abraham, but you'll still find that justification comes by faith, simply believing in what God has done. Not by doing anything, just believing. Not works of righteousness which we have done, just believing in the free, gracious act of God." So he uses Abraham as his example. You say, "Why does he use Abraham?" Well, we can't be absolutely positive, but it seems as though they probably used Abraham as their example. They probably said, "Well, you know old Abraham. He came along and he had to be circumcised."

You can go back to Genesis 17, and the Lord did tell him that. Circumcision became the sign of the physical Israelite, obviously not the true Israelite in his heart. A person could be outwardly, physically circumcised and it never affects his heart. That's what Romans 2 says. But in Genesis 17:9, "God said to Abraham, 'You will keep my covenant, therefore, you and your seed after you, and their generations.'" This is the covenant. "Every male child among you shall be circumcised. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old will be circumcised among you, every male child in your generation, that he is born in the house or bought with money of any foreigner that is not of your seed. He that is born in your house, and he

that is bought with your money, must needs be circumcised. My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant and the uncircumcised male child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, he shall be cut off from my people. He has broken my covenant."

Here was a national, physical identity with Israel. God had said, "Abraham, this will be a sign." Surely the Judaizers would say, "See, God said all the true children of Abraham, all the true ones would have to be circumcised." So they were selling circumcision as an act by which a man brought himself into right relationship with God. They taught that the natural descendants of Abraham were those who were circumcised, and the only way that Gentiles could get into the blessing of God was by circumcision. So they made circumcision necessary for salvation.

So Paul takes Abraham, and says, "If you want to use Abraham for an argument, I'll use him too." He says, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness." I told you two weeks ago that Abraham was circumcised 14 years after God said that, so circumcision didn't have a thing to do with Abraham being declared righteous. Fourteen years later, he was circumcised, according to Genesis. It's a clear statement.

Verse 7. "Know ye, therefore, that they who are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham." His was a faith salvation. So the Apostle Paul says, "They that are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham." In a spiritual sense, we are the children of Abraham. Not physically. I'm not a Jew; when I became a Christian, I did not become a Jew. I'll never be a Jew, but I am a child of Abraham in a spiritual sense. He is kind of like the primary example of faith. He is sort of the father of faith. All who follow in his kind of faith, believing God, are spiritual children of Abraham, though not physical.

Verse 8. "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all nations be blessed.'" So Paul says, "Even the Old Testament predicted this, that all nations as nations, Gentiles as Gentiles, would be able to be blessed in Abraham through faith. The key words are there in the middle of the verse: through faith. So God is going to justify the Gentiles not by circumcision but through faith. That's what God meant when He said to Abraham, "Through you will all nations be blessed."

What does it mean, "In you will all nations be blessed?" Well, it was simply this. That through the loins of Abraham came whom? Messiah. So it was in Messiah that all were blessed. Take that far enough back, and it was the seed of Abraham that became the one who blessed all. He said, "In you, in your seed, in your loins is that which will come and be a blessing to all." So in the very calling of Abraham, in the end of verse 8, was the promise that Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles. They didn't have to become Jews; they didn't have to get circumcised and keep all the ceremony and the law. We're going over this very quickly since we covered it in detail last time.

So Paul says, "Abraham was justified by faith. Anyone else who believes like Abraham did is the spiritual child of Abraham." God, from the very start, told Abraham that the Gentiles would be saved

through faith. There was coming one from his loins who would be the one to bless all nations as nations. That assumed that they wouldn't become Jews. If 'all nations' were being blessed, they would have to be other than Jews. Otherwise, it would say, "In you shall everyone be blessed who becomes a Jew." No. "In you will all nations be blessed." So Paul proves his point.

Verse 9. "So, then, they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." God blesses those who put their faith in Him. Paul proves his point by quoting from Genesis, the Old Testament statement, "In you will all nations be blessed." He shows that this was nothing but a prediction that through the loins of Abraham would come one in whom people could put faith and be saved. That's the positive proof.

Let's look at the negative proof and the part that runs from verses 10-14. Here's the negative proof that salvation is by faith as seen in Old Testament Scripture. I want you to pay attention to this, because I think it's important. You say, "What do you mean, a negative proof?" Just this: in verses 6-9, Paul showed what faith did. Faith justified Abraham. Now Paul shows what works *can't* do. That's the negative. Here's what faith does do, here's what works can't do. Boy, he really comes on with a strong, strong argument. Paul uses, again, the Old Testament. He used it all the time. In Acts 26:22, he says, "Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue to this day witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say." Paul said, "I always use the Old Testament. This isn't any new stuff." So Paul is now going to say what works can't do. He said what faith could do, here's what works can't do.

He basically says three things. First, he says this. "The man who accepts the law as the way of salvation has to stand or fall on the basis of law." In other words, if you want to get redeemed by law, good luck. The second thing he says is, "It's impossible to stand on the law." The third thing is, "The person who tries is cursed." So if you're going to try to live by law, you have to go whole-hog for the law. Secondly, you ought to know it's impossible; thirdly, you ought to know that you're cursed for failing. It's a head-on collision - believe me - with the Judaizers. You can't just sprinkle a little law in your life and say, "I really believe it's faith, and I do believe in Jesus Christ, I accept what He did for me, but I have to add a little works." No, if you're going to add a little works, if works have anything to do with your salvation, then you're putting yourself under law and law demands perfection. So you might as well forget it. It's impossible, and if you try and fail, you're cursed.

The Jews were so gung-ho for the law that the rabbis even tried to prove that the patriarchs (Adam, Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, all of them) kept the law even before it was written, that God had revealed it to them and they kept it all. You know why the rabbis tried to prove that? Because they wanted to have the patriarchs justified and they knew that the only way to be justified was through keeping the law. So they had tried to impose a legalistic system on the patriarchs who lived before Moses did. The law was everything to these Judaizers. In fact, the average Jewish scholar held the vulgar, the ummah erets, the common people, who had neither knowledge nor interest in the law, were under the

curse of God. The law was everything. Here, Paul turns the table on them.

Verse 10. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." That's pretty strong stuff. Here, he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26. "For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" Listen, he says, "If you go back to your Old Testament, Deuteronomy says, 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in *all* things that are written in the book of the law.'" He has backed up and said, "Abraham was justified by faith, God's promise was that all nations would be justified through the way of faith. Faith alone proved justification. If you want to live by law, the law will curse you." Why? "Because you are commanded to continue in everything written in the book of the law." Instead of being blessed by being put under the law, they were under a curse. Anyone who wants to live under legalism binds himself to live to the whole law. If you think you can save yourself by doing anything, you put yourself under all of it.

We were taken to the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico City. It is a very famous basilica, a very famous church. The Virgin Mary supposedly, in Catholic tradition, appeared all over the place. So you have the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of Here, and the Virgin of There, and the Virgin of This, and the Virgin of That. It's all appearances of Mary at all different places. Every town has their Virgin, and she appeared at a certain time and place in history. It was all supposed to be different manifestations of Mary. This was all sort of passed down from tradition to tradition to tradition. At the Shrine of Guadalupe, there is about 150 or 200 yards from the street to the church, which is sinking and slants crazily. Everything in Mexico City is sinking because it was built where a lake was, and built inadequately, so it's all sinking and this church is lopsided. There is an area of between 150 and 200 yards.

We went to this place, and all these people were crawling on their knees from the street to the entrance, from between 150 and 200 yards. Old and young women, with their knees bruised and cut and scraped, continued to crawl, holding little babies in their arms. They crawled the whole length of that thing. A fellow was there who is a missionary with a brother church, and we all asked him, "What is going on?" It boils down to the fact that these people are trying to earn their salvation. They are earning their salvation. Pain, agony, works. If you do anything to earn your salvation, you are immediately putting yourself under the whole law. That's what Paul says, under the whole thing. If you're going to throw to God any good work, then you'd better give Him everything. That's the point.

I thought to myself, as I looked at those people, how tragic it is that they're trapped by the Catholic Church in this horrible system. It's pathetic, tragic. Then when I was prone to blame the Catholic Church, I remembered this, that they're all without excuse too. Right? Because that which may be known about God is available to them. But men, in their own hearts, are somewhat satisfied by their own self-righteousness. So the Apostle Paul says, "According to your own Old Testament, you Galatians, wake up! What those Jews were telling you, they don't even know their Old Testament. If they put themselves under any law, they put themselves under the whole law." Israel did this, believe me.



Verse 2. "I bear them witness, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They, being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about trying to establish their own righteousness." Rather than having God's righteousness, they tried to establish their own. So he says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue." There's no sense in putting yourself under a legal system; all it can do is curse you.

Romans 4:15 is a great little statement. "The law works wrath." That's all. The law just brings judgment. Verse 11. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident because the just shall live by faith." You know what he's quoting? Habakkuk 2:4. Again, quoting the Old Testament. I told you he was going to use two things to prove his point. Experience (verses 1-5) and Scripture (3:6-4:7). Here's another Scripture. He says, "If you even knew your own Bible, your Old Testament, you'd know Habakkuk said, 'The just shall live by faith.' The law is going to curse you, faith is going to save you."

Verse 12. "And the law is not of faith." That's an interesting statement. What is he saying? He's saying that law and faith are opposite, mutually exclusive. The law and faith do not go together. The law is not of faith. If you have any legalism, you violate the simplicity of faith. Now, if you want to live by the law and get saved by law, then God wants perfect performance.

Remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus arrived and they all said, "Oh, my, we're so holy. We keep all the laws." So Jesus said, "Try this one on. Be perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect." Hmmm? Perfect like God? If you want to live by law, that's the standard. "Well, we've never killed." If you hate your brother, you're a murderer. "Well, we've never committed adultery." If you look at a woman and lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart. Jesus just destroyed their claim to self-righteousness. No, you can't live by the law. If you try, you'll bring a curse. You break one single law, and you've violated everything.

You know, it's kind of like being a ship. If you were a ship, moored to some great, solid rock, and had this great chain holding you. If a tremendous \_\_\_\_\_ storm came, only one link would need to be broken and you're gone. That's how it is with the law. It says, in verse 12, "The man that does them will live in them." Buddy, if you want to live by law, that's exactly what you've got to do. If you want to do the law to get saved, then you'll have to live it to the nth degree.

That's Leviticus 18:5. He uses another Scripture. He's taking the Old Testament and turning it on them. Leviticus 18:5 is the accuser; they can't keep the law. So instead of being saved by the law, the only thing the law does is curse you. The law just shows you're a sinner. There's only one way to be saved, and that's through faith in Christ.

So Paul destroys their hope in the law. First he says, "If you want to keep the law, you have to live by the whole thing." That's in verse 12, you have to do it all. Then he says, in verse 11, "But you can't.

You can't do it all. By the law, in the sight of God, no man is justified." Thirdly, backing up to verse 10. "If you try, the only thing you'll be is cursed." Well, Paul closes with a glorious remedy for such desperate people. You can't achieve self-righteousness. You can't make yourself right before God. The Judaizers are wrong. Circumcision, ritual, ceremony, all that stuff doesn't do it. Then how does it happen? How can we come to God? How can we be made righteous? What's this all about?

Verse 13. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.'" Now look at the verse, how tremendous. We should spend time preaching for a month on that verse. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law." The word 'redeemed,' exagorazo, it means 'to buy out of the marketplace,' to redeem a slave. Christ has purchased us back from slavery. What was the price? Listen. "For as much as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish or spot." I Peter 1:18-19. The price was blood. The only thing that could pay for our sin was blood, and Jesus took the curse on Himself.

I'll show you something interesting in verse 13. "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree." That's Deuteronomy 21:23. Paul uses another Old Testament verse. Jesus was made a curse. He was made a curse for whom? For us. He paid our debt, our price.

It's interesting in Jewish history that every criminal sentenced to death under the Mosaic legislation, and executed, usually by stoning, was then taken and tied to a post, or 'hanged on a tree.' This was a symbol of his rejection by God, to be a visible thing that the people could see. So after the stoning, the body was tied to a post as a visible representation of the man being rejected by God. Let me hasten to say this: this verse does not mean that a man is cursed by God because he died on a cross, or because he was hanged on a tree. It means that because he was cursed by God, he was hanged on a tree. See the difference? He wasn't cursed by God because he was hanged on a tree; he was hanged on a tree because he was cursed by God. You could die on a cross and not be cursed by God. But in those days, when men were rejected by God, that was the sign of His rejection - that they were placed on a post. Jesus was cursed by God.

How? You ask, "How could Jesus be cursed by God?" Well, certainly not because of His own sin, but He bore our sins in His own body. Can God look on iniquity? No. God spent the violence of His curse on Christ in our behalf.

I'll tell you something, folks, it's no wonder that the Jews couldn't believe Jesus was their Messiah. Right? If they knew Deuteronomy 21:23 and they knew Jesus died on a cross, it's no wonder that they would have a hard time believing He was their Messiah. They would say, "How in the world could the Messiah, the Anointed of God, be cursed by God?" In fact, in I Corinthians 12:3, the implication is that, when the Gospel was preached, the Jews would scream back, "Jesus is accursed! Jesus is accursed!" The reason they would do that is probably tied to the idea that He was hanged

on a tree. Well, some Jews saw that He was hanged on that tree for their sake, and that made the difference.

Look at verse 13. There are two words, and there were no greater words ever written. "For us." Huper hemon. On our behalf. We deserved the curse, but He took it. Friends, listen. Can you keep the law? No. If you can't keep the law, are you cursed? Yes. But God comes along and says, "I'm not going to make you bear your own curse, I'll put My Son in the substitution place. He'll take your curse." God spent the fury of His curse against sin on Jesus, who bore all your sin. Your sin has already had its death blow, isn't that great? The curse has already been spent, in all its fury, on Jesus Christ for your sin. My sin, and yours, friend, is already paid for. It's done! The curse is lifted!

Verse 14. "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, and that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." The curse is lifted, and God did it for two reasons. One, that the blessing of Abraham, the blessing of righteousness, that the blessing of being made righteous might come on all the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, and that they might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. Those two things. As always, God has a purpose. He wants all men to be made righteous and to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. So He spent the curse on Christ, that we might be blessed; that we might receive the Holy Spirit.

How do you receive it? Well, look at the end of verse 14. Two words: through faith. We know this. You say, "What kind of faith?" Have you ever thought about what real faith, justifying faith, is? Let me give you three quick shots. First of all, self-renunciation: that's saving faith; it starts with self-renunciation. It's when you come to the place where you put absolutely no hope in yourself; that's the start of justifying faith. You're like the children of Israel when Pharaoh was in hot pursuit. Ahead of them was the Red Sea, about to devour them; there was only one direction to go, up, and they couldn't do it. Right? That's the way the sinner is. The sinner who is coming to the point of true justifying faith sees the justice of God pursuing him. He sees Hell waiting to devour him. He knows he needs to get to God, but he can't. In desperation, he knows he has no resource in himself and there's nothing he can do.

The second thing is reliance, self-renunciation and reliance. All of a sudden, he is offered a way of escape in Jesus Christ and he casts himself on Christ's mercy, forgiveness and power to save. The last word is appropriation. Christ offers the gift, and he takes it. That's saving faith. Not very complicated, is it? It's when you've reached the end of your rope. Some may say, "Well, my faith is weak, so weak." That's alright! A weak faith can receive a strong Christ. How about this? The promise is made not to strong faith, but to true faith. True faith. "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." Paul says, "Yes, justification is by faith. You know it from experience [verses 1-5]; you know it from Scripture. Positive proof? Abraham! Justified by faith. Negative proof? The only thing that ever happens with the law is curse."

Beloved, you need to be made right with God, don't you? How are you going to do that? You say, "Well, I'm going to be good, go to church, God will like me a lot. I'll read the Bible, pray, be religious." You're cursed. You say, "Hey, I can't do anything! I'm the worst, I can't save myself." If you cast yourself on the mercy of Jesus Christ, you're blessed with Abraham, a child of faith.

I close with a very pointed Scripture. You've heard it before; listen again. "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." Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the marvelous statement of Deuteronomy 30:19 which we just read, that You have set before us blessing and cursing, faith and law, grace and works. Father, may we choose blessing, through faith. Thank you for the testimony of these men tonight, who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and have known the transformation that He alone can bring about. Father, help us never to depend on ourselves, but always to be at the end of our ropes, always to be trapped between hell and Your justice. May we know that it is only as we fall on Your mercy that there is any hope.

We pray, Father, that You would speak to the heart of anyone here tonight who doesn't know You as Savior, that you would bring them to the place where they are trapped between Hell and Your justice with no escape. May they come to Jesus Christ and accept the free and blessed gift of salvation that He offers. We pray in His blessed name, Amen.

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