

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**February 12, 2012**

**Freed from Law Through Christ**

Read Galatians 3:1-14

**Key verse: “[Christ Jesus redeemed us] in order that...the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14)**

A train rumbles into the station with warning bell clanging. The doors open, the uniformed conductor steps out, and you climb on board and find your way to a seat. When you look around the car, you see tickets clipped on the top of occupied seats, paid for with hard-earned money. Those tickets displayed at each seat are the special concern of the conductor, who walks through the car to punch tickets and confirm that you paid for the right to take this ride. If the conductor finds you without a ticket you will either pay on the spot or be escorted off the train at the next stop. To ride this train, what matters is the paid ticket. This is righteousness by works and law.

Righteousness by grace, on the other hand, works in a very different way. God’s train pulls into the station, warning bell clanging. The doors open and the conductor steps out. Masses of people crowd on board and find their seats, for most everyone wants to ride this train to the city where people never die. Eventually the conductor walks through the train to see if everyone belongs on board. But on this train the conductor is not looking for tickets clipped to the top of seats. In fact, anyone who tries to pay for the right to be on the train will be escorted promptly from the train at the very next stop.

That’s correct, no one can earn the right to be on this train. What the conductor looks for as he walks seat by seat through the car is the penniless people he knows by name, the people who are his friends and who completely lack the means to pay. These poverty stricken people climb on board with only one hope: they believe in the generosity of their conductor friend.

Craig Larson shared this story, then explained: “This is righteousness by grace. A ride on God’s train is a gift. By our standards, it’s unfair. It’s scandalous. But like it or not, it’s heaven’s way.”

Paul continues his Magna Charta of Christian freedom, called Galatians, with a passionate defense of salvation by grace through faith. Responding to the false teaching that, in order to be saved, folks must keep all the law of Moses, Paul is indignant: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (v. 1) *(continued)*

In the following verses Paul argues from both *experience* and from *Scripture* that, through the cross, Christ has set us free from the bondage of law and of works-righteousness.

In Paul's appeal to *experience* (vv. 2-5), he argues that the initial conversion experiences of the Galatians were by faith rather than by "works of the law" (v. 2). He also reminds them of how God has worked in their lives to fill and gift them by His Spirit and to work miracles among them. These experiences of grace, Paul argues, did not come through "works of the law" but through sheer grace as the Galatians believed and trusted the Lord (v. 5). In reminding the Galatians of these grace-filled experiences, starting with conversion to Christ, Paul insists that *all* of the Christian life is by grace through faith.

In verses 6-14, Paul shifts his appeal to the Old Testament *Scripture*. His argument goes something like this:

1. Abraham, widely recognized in Paul's day as the prototype of a righteous person, was made right with God not through works of the law but by believing God. Paul recalls that in Genesis 15:6 God pronounced Abraham to be righteous when Abraham *believed* God's promise. So, even Abraham, the great Old Testament man of God, was not saved by works of the law but *because of faith*.

2. Next Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26 – "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all things written in the book of the law." Here are the logical implications: If you decide to seek God's favor by your own ability to keep the Mosaic law, you must perfectly keep all of the law or be "cursed." Since no one can ever perfectly keep the law's demands, salvation by law is destined to fail. The inevitable result of trying to be right with God by being right with law is a "curse."

3. In an ironic turn, Paul then cites Deuteronomy 21:3 as leading toward God's solution for our failure to keep the law. That verse says, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." But guess what? Here is the great reversal of grace! By hanging on Calvary's "tree," Jesus "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Through His sacrificial, substitutionary death, Christ took away the curse so that "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14).

The message is clear: Christian, you are free. Stay free. Don't let anyone or anything ever take the amazing out of God's grace!

This is the message at the heart of Galatians. But before leaving this passage, let's return to a verse that has practical implications for our Christian living, Gal. 3:3. That verse says: "Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?"

Many people were blessed to hear and receive the truth that we are saved, not by works, but by grace through faith. But too often, following conversion, we fall back into a pattern of trying to please God by our own works-righteousness. Often this happens when, in a sincere desire to grow in Christ, we begin to see such spiritual disciplines as Bible

study, service, worship, and prayer not as means to the end of growth in grace but as ways to earn “brownie points” with God. Galatians 3:3 reminds us that not only our salvation experience is by grace through faith but so is our sanctification. As someone put it, “the way *in* is the way *on*.” That is, just as we got in (were saved) by grace, so we make continued progress in the Christian life by grace through faith. As we believe God, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to help us grow in Christ.

So, don't let anything—not even a sincere desire to grow spiritually—ever take the amazing out of God's grace!

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