Good morning. I’m excited and honored to have the opportunity to open God’s Word with you this morning. Our privilege and responsibility is to worship Him. Let’s spend a few moments in silence as we prepare our hearts and minds for worship through the preaching of God’s word.

Seventeen months ago, Brooke and I received a life-changing phone call. An adoption agency called to inform us that there was a birth-mom looking to place her yet to be born baby and that we were an excellent match for her. Though Brooke was pregnant, we felt compelled to proceed. Fast-forward several months to late-July and we find Brooke and I travelling and praying and waiting for our dear baby. Quincy Joy was born on August 3rd and we began the adoption process immediately. After several legal hassles, the adoption was finalized September 25, 2009. Before that date, she wasn’t adopted. After that date, she was adopted.

For those of you who have believed the Gospel, you have been adopted. God has made you His son or daughter through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Imagine with me if Quincy was given the choice to join my family and that she could communicate her thoughts. Our conversation might have been something like this.

“Quincy, you have a choice. Brooke and I would like to adopt you and bring you into our family. You would become our eldest child, become a sister to Clara, and have a dog that wants to lick your face. Your mother and I would love you, pray for you, encourage you, and provide for you: food, shelter, clothing, and so much more. We would rock you to sleep when you were sick, clean you when you were dirty, and do all we can to protect you from harm. In our hearts and in reality, you would be no different than any other child in our family. You would be entitled to every opportunity and privilege that any of our children would have. If you decline our invitation, I cannot promise you what kind of parents you will have. I do not know who will provide for you or love you.”

If Quincy could speak, she might reply “So you’ll provide for my needs, love me, and care for me and the rest… But, what’s the catch? What do I have to DO?”

Now, we both know what the answer to this question is. It’s one of the best parts of this whole idea. The answer to Quincy would be “NOTHING!” You don’t have to do ANYTHING!!! Sure, I’d love it if you’d behave around company, and obey your mother, and do your homework. But you don’t HAVE to do ANYTHING! We want you to be our daughter and we want to be in relationship with you. In fact, our relationship will not be dependent on what you do. Your adoption will be independent of your actions. Now of course Quincy speaking this way is hypothetical. But, her adoption is not. It has been finished.

Now if in the course of time, Quincy wants to discuss her adoption, we’ll remind her of our story. And if she forgets, and begins to attempt to earn her position with the family, I will tell her
how ridiculous it is for her to think she can achieve her status as our daughter. I’ll sit her down and explain how much Brooke and I love her and how there is nothing she can do to make us love her more. I’ll remind her that she is ALREADY our daughter and that she doesn’t need to “earn” or “perform” for either our affections or her position. All of that was settled long ago.

Similarly, many of us can quickly forget the free gift of salvation given to us. Though we are adopted sons and daughters of God, we can quickly turn from grace and begin working to earn God’s favor or seek, by our actions, to be made right with God.

Here is how William Farley puts it in his book Gospel Powered Parenting, “The default condition of our flesh is that we have to ‘earn it’. That’s why the Gospel is so important. We enter the world in love with legalism. We are convinced that we can merit God’s favor. We love moralism, but we resist the gospel.”

We aren’t so different from the Galatians, who were also guilty of this. Legalism is not just annoying, it is incredibly dangerous. In fact, it will kill your soul. If you attempt to be made right with God by your actions, you will fail and the consequences will be eternal. This morning we’re going to read from Galatians 3:6-14 and see how those who believe are made right with God while those who follow the law are cursed by God.

Before I read our passage this morning, I want to be sure we’re caught up to this part of the letter. The Apostle Paul was a missionary and travelled to different cities and countries, preaching the Gospel and planting churches. On his second missionary journey, he went to some cities in an area called Galatia. He preached the Gospel and what happened? Churches were started. After he left, some leaders came through explaining how Jesus was not enough for salvation. In fact, their message was “Jesus plus.”

Now this may sound unconceivable, but it’s actually quite normal. As humans, we’re almost hardwired to think we can earn our salvation. It’s not hard to look around and see “Christians” who have added something to the Gospel. It may be baptism, or speaking in tongues, or some other performance, but it’s usually the same foundationally—Jesus plus (fill in the blank).

Well, in this situation, the Galatians were being told that they needed to become Jews in order to be truly saved. The Galatians needed to celebrate Jewish holidays and follow Jewish laws. One of the bigger issues in becoming Jewish, was that the Gentile men needed to be circumcised. Do you know what the only problem with this body of teaching is? In fact, do you know the only problem with adding anything to the Gospel? The only problem is that IT IS COMPLETELY WRONG!!! The Gospel is clear: by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

So far in this letter to the Galatians, Paul has defended the Gospel and validated himself. He has explained that he received this Gospel from God, that the apostles accepted both him and this Gospel. And he explained that he even had to confront Peter over implications of the Gospel.

Paul has just finished arguing in the beginning of chapter 3 that the Galatians didn’t receive the Spirit by the law, why would they turn to it now? And we find ourselves now at verse 6 as Paul displays how the Old Testament points to the Gospel.
A final comment: Notice how Paul anchors his arguments in this passage. It’s not only in common sense, but also in something much more powerful, faithful, and true. He references the Old Testament four different times while he makes these arguments.

Now let’s turn to this morning’s text. Please stand for the reading of God’s Word.

3:6-14 Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”  
7Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” 9So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

10All 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.” 11Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” 12The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” 13Christ 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.” 14He 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.

This is the word of the Lord.

Let’s look at how Paul explains that those who believe are made right with God.

3:6 Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Now false teachers may have pointed to Abraham as their preeminent model for this belief of Jesus plus. They may have argued that Abraham was circumcised, followed the law, and was Jewish. And so, those who want to be made right with God must follow suit.

The problem with this argument is that Scripture tells us in Genesis 15:6 that “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Abraham wasn’t circumcised until chapter 17. Additionally, Abraham didn’t have the law. It didn’t come for another 500 years. Finally, Abraham wasn’t born Jewish. He’s the ancestor of the whole race, but was a good pagan before he was called from Haran.

3:7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

Consequently, those who believe as Abraham believed, are his spiritual children and are also made right with God (justified).

3:8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”
Paul argues that the Gospel was announced back in Genesis 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” The Gospel wasn’t only for the Jews. Rather, ALL NATIONS (Jews and Gentiles) are included. It says it right there in Genesis!

3:9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Here’s the point. All who believe are made right with God—that is, they are justified. I want to be clear with this word, justification. Justification in a legal sense is that we were guilty and have been made “not guilty” because of Jesus’ payment of sin by his death on our behalf. So, it doesn’t matter your ethnic heritage. What matters is your faith.

Now Paul turns from looking at those who believe and are made right with God to those who follow the Law and are cursed. And here we find both bad news and good news. When someone looks at you and says “I have good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?” How do you respond? I’m a bad news first guy. Tell me the problem and then let’s get on to the good stuff. This is how Paul frames this second section.

3:10 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.”

Perhaps you’re wondering what being cursed involves. I’m not going to read the whole passage now, but you can look at Deuteronomy 28:15-68 for an explanation of these curses. Here’s the simple answer: you don’t want to be cursed.

Here is the bad news for legalists: all who rely on the law are under a curse. Yep, I’d say that this is about as bad of news as a legalist could hear. If you are trying to be made right with God by earning your salvation, you are cursed. Paul is quoting here from Deuteronomy 27:26 “Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Pastor Mike explained this to me well when he said “The Law demands both continual performance and complete performance.” That’s a real double-whammy. If you are seeking to be justified by the law, you have to do it perfectly and into all perpetuity. So, we can understand clearly that we cannot earn salvation!

3:11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”

Paul continues to support his position by pointing to Habakkuk 2:4 “but the righteous will live by his faith.” His argument continues…

3:12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”

The Old Testament is clear—to live by the law means that we must do these things” meaning—live perfectly by the law! Legalists cannot be made right with God because the righteous must live by faith. Paul cross-references Leviticus 18:5 here to explain that the law is not based on
faith. Paul is clear—as is Scripture—if you’re trying to attain salvation by the law, it’s all or nothing.

Well after a solid dose of bad news for legalists, Paul now turns to the good news.

3:13 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.”

The Good news is that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Paul cross-references Deuteronomy 21:23 “Because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”

3:14 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.

Redemption, through Jesus, is available to all—even Gentiles! Isn’t that fantastic! We’re not doomed on behalf of our ethnicity. And it follows, that the Jews aren’t saved by theirs. The blessing given to Abraham—the forgiveness of our sins and the blessing of God’s presence, as the Holy Spirit, is available to all of us.

Consider for a moment the major religions that identify Abraham as the father of the faith. You probably know them: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Now, who really gets to sing “Father Abraham?” Are we all sons of Abraham so to speak? Do you know what the fundamental difference is between Biblical Christianity and both Judaism and Islam? Judaism and Islam are both religions built on works and performance. I have to DO enough to please God and if I can somehow DO enough and be GOOD enough, I can EARN salvation. Isn’t it a bit interesting that as Christians we can fall right into this trap? How many times have you found yourself reverting to this anti-Gospel way of thinking? If you’re trying to earn salvation, you can sing this song all you like—but you are not a true child of Abraham.

Here’s how Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it: “Grace is favor shown to people who do not deserve any favor at all. We deserve nothing but hell. If you think you deserve heaven, take it from me, you are not a Christian.” See, real Christians understand the Gospel—we are broken people who have failed God miserably. We deserve Hell and are only welcomed into Heaven because of Christ’s death on the cross for us.

My guess is that many of you could correctly answer questions about the nature of your salvation. You understand The Gospel cognitively—but I wonder how many of you are like me and struggle with functional legalism? You get sucked into this performance trap and think thoughts like…

I didn’t do my quiet time/devotions today, and that’s why I had a flat tire. I didn’t tithe enough and that why I got the flu. I didn’t pray enough and that’s why my child is struggling with relationships. If only I would go to church more, or get baptized, or tithe more, then God would surely bless me—or at least love me more.
I want to ask you a question. If this describes your relationship with Jesus, are you tired? Are you ready to leave this old way of thinking? These thoughts and actions will not help you to be right with God.

Our text this morning calls for us to understand how we are made right with God (by faith) and what we have faith in (the Gospel). Mark Driscoll explains the difference between grace-based living and performance-based living. He titles his categories Religion and the Gospel.

Religion: If we obey, God will love us.
The Gospel: Because God has loved us through Jesus, we can obey.

Religion: There are Good people and Bad people.
Gospel: We are all Bad people who are either repentant or unrepentant.

Religion: You trust in what you do as a good person.
Gospel: You trust in the perfect, sinless life of Jesus because He alone is the only good and moral person.

Religion is about trying to get things from God (health/wealth/insight/power/control).
The Gospel is about God giving us Himself by grace.

Religion is about what I have to do.
The Gospel is about what I get to do.

Religion explains that hardship is punishment for not obeying.
The Gospel tells me that hardship is sanctifying affliction that reminds us of Jesus’ suffering and is lovingly used by God to make us more like Jesus.

Religion is about me.
The Gospel is about Jesus.

Religion leads to uncertainty about my standing before God because I never know if I’ve done enough to please him.
The Gospel leads me to certainty about my standing before God because of the finished work of Jesus on my behalf on the cross.

Religion ends in pride or despair. Pride because I think I’m better than others or despair because I continue to fall so short of God’s commands.
The Gospel ends in humble and confident joy because of the power of Jesus at work for me, in me, through me, and sometimes in spite of me.

Well, we’ve come to the part of the sermon that is most critical. We can sit here and understand the main message of Scripture all day long, but we must be willing to respond to it! Perhaps you’re asking yourself, “Now what?”
Application #1: Reflect
You need to evaluate your motives with God. Spend time reflecting, or visiting with a trusted friend or mentor and ask “Am I trying to earn God’s love?” Consider what your motives are for reading your Bible, attending corporate worship, or any other number of Christian activities. Why do you do what you do? Are you trying to please God? Are you trying to please others?

Then ask yourself, “Do I really believe the Gospel?” Not just cognitively, but also practically. Are you living a life that is being practically impacted by the Gospel—the main message of the Bible? Or are you guilty of playing religious games. Do you think that you have good days when you’re following the rules and bad days when you don’t? Do you believe that if you live obediently, then God will love you? If you aren’t sure, ask God to reveal any hint of legalism in your heart. Ask him to illuminate your motives and bring to mind those which aren’t in alignment with the Gospel.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

As you reflect, consider where your motives are anchored. If you determine that they are being influenced by legalism, you need to repent.

In the Outpost, the student ministry building next door, we talk often about “Surrender.” We define surrender with three action words: Admit, Turn, Go. This is the vocabulary we use to translate this Christianese word “repent”. Surrender is a second response.

Application #2: Surrender
If upon reflection, you realize that you are guilty of trying to earn your salvation, you need to surrender. Get on your knees in humble acknowledgment that you have sinned against God. Confess your failure and own it. Allow the gravity and reality of your failure to strike your heart. As you recognize your utter failure, do not allow yourself to remain in this mindset indefinitely. You don’t please God by putting yourself under condemnation. Instead, beat condemnation by confessing to God and then believe Him that he forgives you.

After you confess, turn from your sin! Abandon any strategy you may have to attempt to earn God’s love. Ask God to change your heart and give you courage, knowledge, and wisdom to not only believe the Gospel but to live out of the Gospel. Ask God to replace your desire to earn salvation with the peace that He has settled your salvation.

After you have Admitted your sin and Turned from it, Go to God. Seek His face. Read His Word. Anchor yourself in the Gospel. Spend time meditating on Gospel-focused Scriptures (e.g. Romans 3; Isaiah 53; 1 Corinthians 15; the whole book of Galatians). Read books that reiterate the Gospel and encourage you to live out of the Gospel (e.g. The Gospel Primer by Milton Vincent, What is the Gospel by Greg Gilbert, The Cross-Centered Life by CJ Mahaney). Sing songs that put music to the Gospel. This is one reason that I am thankful for Andy. He leads us by choosing songs that actually announce and point our hearts toward the great gift of God through Christ. We need to, as Jerry Bridges says, “preach the Gospel to ourselves daily.” One hymn verse I have found myself singing over and over has been…
My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought.
My sin, not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it now more
Praise the Lord praise the Lord, Oh my soul

I want to caution you though. Please guard your heart that the Gospel doesn’t become tired news. In fact, there might be some of you sitting here this morning thinking “Here we go again. More Gospel shmospel.” You’re in a very dangerous place when the Gospel becomes a passing thought. As CJ Mahaney has put it, the Gospel should “freshly affect” you. Take the time and energy necessary to allow the Gospel to impact your mind, heart, and life.

Have any of you tried the new frozen yogurt place called Orange Leaf? Did you like it? Was it as fun for you as it was for me? What did you do after you ate there? Have you seen that YouTube video with the praying dog? It’s so cute, a guy calls the dog over before dinner and the dog puts his paws on leg and buries his face under his leg. Tell me, what did you do after you watched it? Have your read a good book lately? After you read a really good book, what do you do? I’ll tell you what Pastor Josh does. He tells me about it. And I can tell you he has read a lot of good books lately because my “to read” shelf is full! Here’s the point of eating at a new place, watching a funny video, or reading a book. When you get excited about these things, you want to share it with others!

Application #3: Share
I love sharing good news with other people. I remember my college psychology teacher telling me that this phenomenon is normal for most humans. We want to be the first to let the world know great news. Whether it’s a job promotion or a new pregnancy or your favorite team winning the game—we love to share good news.

Let me ask you. DID YOU HEAR THE GOOD NEWS?!? We don’t have to earn our salvation. Eternity isn’t contingent on how many good or bad things I’ve done. We can set our confidence on Christ and His finished work for us.

Friends, the world is dying for good news. And isn’t this the best news there is? You can be forgiven for your failures if you believe in Christ. There are billions of people in the world who need this Gospel and millions in America who do not believe the Gospel. There are literally thousands of people in this city who don’t know this great news. And there are probably people sitting in this church who don’t know the Gospel. There are neighbors of ours and co-workers who need to know this incredibly good news. The Bible tells us that those who don’t believe the Gospel are headed to an eternity of suffering. Won’t you please take the Gospel and share it?

The Gospel is clearly seen in the Old Testament. You must receive righteousness by faith and abandon legalism. Someday, I hope that I’ll be able to sit with Quincy and Clara and share with them this Gospel. And as I explain the great news to their young hearts and minds, I imagine that it will finally click, and God willing—they will believe. And perhaps the girls may realize that Quincy’s adoption into my family—the Krause family—is in some ways similar to their adoption into God’s family.
And as I wait for that day, I wonder if today, there are any of you who would like become a member of God’s family. Are you ready to abandon legalism and embrace the Gospel by faith? Romans 10:9-10 says “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

If you are interested in surrendering to Christ this morning, it would be my pleasure to talk to you. Please come on up here and let’s chat. Allow me to pray please.
References


