

GALATIANS 3:15-18

39

PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 3:19-29

41

• • •

*“Choose the way of grace, the Gospel of grace, and Christ becomes the curse for you. The choice is ours.”*

• • •

A person like Paul always seems to take things to extremes. He’s certainly making a big deal out of the Judaizers’ suggestion. After all, they weren’t knocking the Gospel of grace, just adding to it, a little: circumcision, a Levitical requirement here and there, that’s all. Later maybe, a few additional things. But, after all, they were being very nice about it. And what would it hurt?

Yes, a person like Paul does seem to take things to extremes — always with very good reason. For one thing, it wasn’t just a question of circumcision. It was a question of which path to justification, salvation, you were going to take. And if you are going to take the path of the law, you are going to have to follow the rule of the law which says you can’t pick and choose. You’ve got to do it all (Deuteronomy 28:1). And you’ve got to do it all the time. Whoops. It’s bad enough just thinking future. But what about the past? You know what you have been and done. And even if you weren’t and hadn’t, you know yourself better than anyone. Not likely that you can fool yourself.

No matter how high an opinion you cherish about yourself, you know that starting this minute you can last no more than a half-a-week without “blowing it.” Whoever is “without blemish and without spot” say “I.” Then, come back tomorrow and try to say “I” again. And you’re one of the better ones. There are some things, of course, you can’t manage at all, can’t even get a good start at. So you’re out before you begin. There are those ten big ones in Exodus 20. They are almost totally impossible, and the world we live in is no help. “No other gods,” just when the new car models are moving into showrooms everywhere.

“You shall not steal,” but with the way the things are set up with the IRS, that’s getting to be a tougher one all the time. Maybe tax reform will help. “You shall not covet,” department stores with their long aisles of counters don’t help much.

It was part of the presumption of Jewish scholarship in Paul’s day, with which an ex-Pharisee like Paul was totally familiar, that those who had neither knowledge of nor interest in Jewish moral and ceremonial law were cursed (John 7:49). Paul turns the tables. To choose the way of the law, he says, which means in all its parts and every moment, leaves you under a dreadful curse. Each minute you’ll be listening for and dreading hearing the curse which is pronounced upon the first, minutest failure. It’s like playing hopscotch, while the others just wait and watch to catch you stepping on the line. As a matter of fact, most of us can be quite specific. We have already failed and we know it, and we know just when and just where, and with whom. To opt for that path numbers you among the cursed.

“Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (v.13). Sounds like a description of Jesus, doesn’t it? Paul doubtless had Christ in mind, too, but he’s quoting Deuteronomy 21:23 and the writer of Deuteronomy was not thinking of Jesus. He was making reference to the custom in early Israel which recognized that death by hanging was reserved for such as were under God’s special curse for having failed the Jewish law. Jesus, as a matter of plain fact, did free us from the curse of the law, from the law itself, by hanging on the tree, the cross, by actually becoming our curse for us. But Paul is not making proclamation of that central fact of the Christian religion here, though it comes through like a “sweet smelling savor.” He’s warning us not to get ourselves out on that limb, the limb of the accursed tree, which is the fate of those who choose the way of law and fail. Climb out on that limb and you’ll share the fate of all who die on the accursed tree. Choose the way of grace, the Gospel of grace, and Christ becomes the curse for you. The choice is ours. But remember, “the one who does them [the deeds of the law] shall live [more likely die] by them.”

#### *GALATIANS 3:15-18*

Paul, more than once, gives strong indication he has a little of the Philadelphia lawyer in him. In chapter 3:15-18, he sets up a straw man and proceeds to cut him low. He is presuming a response to his argument from the Judaizers. He is putting words in their mouths. He is guessing they are, as they read his letter, wrinkling up their brows and pretending some bafflement as they question the Galatians and each other. “What,” they want to know, “is Paul talking about? What does Abraham have to do with any of this? Abraham, after all, lived at the beginning of God’s dealings with men, while the law came centuries later, like the crown of His dealings with them.” Paul’s guess, that this is what is going through the minds of his protagonists, is an educated one. The argument had been used before in support of a religion of law, of works. And Paul is ready for it. Just to make sure he gets to use his carefully crafted reply, he raises the question himself.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

*What is that subtle pressure which forever seeks to turn the focus of our religion, little by little, from wonder for what God has done for us to attention and interest and gratification in what we do for God?*

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Everybody knows a little bit about wills, even if not nearly enough of us make them. A will, interestingly, is not something you tamper with. Not legally. Not morally. People who break seven out of ten commandments before breakfast without giving it a second thought become meticulous and strictly honorable when it comes to last wills and testaments. It has, no doubt, to do with the sanctity with which we hold life and the finality with which we endow death, with our perception that after death a man's sole control over the issue of his life is by way of a will. We cherish the same attitude with reference to the promises we make to the dying. Television dramas have instructed us that a will must be witnessed, and once witnessed, cannot be changed arbitrarily except by the one whose will it is, certainly not by posterity years down the line. We do not play fast and loose with a dead person's wishes.

Paul knows all that, and uses it. Once God delivered His will. He witnessed it and gave it to Abraham. It was a will that gave a promise that salvation would come by what God would do for man. The law, coming years later, could not change the conditions of salvation from undeserving reception of a promise to merited reception by worthiness. That raises a question. What is the law for, then? And Paul will come to that. Right now he's content to steal thunder from the Judaizers by showing how the chronology of the law, coming years after the promise, does not work for the side of the Judaizers, but for his side, the side of promise.

It's all reminiscent of Paul's earlier point. You came to God through faith. Why do you seek to continue with God through works (Gal. 3:3)? What is that subtle pressure which forever seeks to turn the focus of our religion, little by little, from wonder for what God has done for us to attention and interest and gratification in what we do for God? Attending church moves from happy, almost abandoned, praise for the love and majesty of Jesus to an unbroken record on our part of Christian piety. Bible study, once eager searching and discovery, is now an expected and proper activity of respectable Christianity. "Want to" becomes "have to." Breathlessness gives way to a gritting of teeth. Spontaneous joy clouds over with solemnity and even irritation and vexation. We are, in Christianity, a religion of promise, of grace. The spirit of our faith is spontaneous, almost giddy, and certainly grateful. How true we are to that religion can instantly be measured by a quick review of our quotient of gratitude, joy, elation and a happy, positive spirit.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 3:19-29

*Open my heart I pray. Make me attentive. Let it be clear to me that Your will, dear God, is my salvation and that You gave Your Son to make me live. Amen.*

Galatians 3:19-21

1. Of the law we read, "It was added because of transgressions."
  - a. What is the purpose of the law? (Ezekiel 3:18)

---

  - b. What is another purpose of the law? (Romans 3:20, 7:7)

---

  - c. What is a third purpose of the law? (Psalms 119:9, 105)

---
  
2. According to Proverbs 30:12, what assessment do we tend to make of ourselves?
 

---

Is it an accurate assessment?

---
  
3. Why do we not recognize our sins for what they are? (Ephesians 4:18; 2 Peter 1:9; 1 John 1:8)
 

---
  
4. The passage in 2 Corinthians 10:12 catches us in a favorite ploy by which we minimize our sins.
  - a. Describe the ploy.

---

  - b. Illustrate the ploy.

---
  
5. Galatians 3:19 states, "[The law was] put in place through angels by an intermediary."
  - a. Read Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2. Through whose hands did Jewish people believe the law was dispensed by God?
 

---
  - b. Read Exodus 20:18-20. Who was the intermediary representing the Israelites when God dispensed the law?
 

---

Galatians 3:21-25

6. Paul calls the law our "guardian" (ESV); "schoolmaster" (KJV).
  - a. What do you think that means?

---

b. How does it foster the Gospel of grace?

c. Who controls the compulsions (the things you must do) in grammar school, high school, college?

d. Why do college students regard their graduation with such eager anticipation?

e. Who controls the compulsions of life after graduation?

f. Now explain Paul's "guardian" analogy in v. 25.

Galatians 3:26-29

7. The Scripture passages which follow offer descriptive words and phrases of the activity unique to the children of God. Summarize.

a. Matthew 5:9

b. Luke 20:36

c. Romans 8:21

d. 1 John 3:10-11

8. By what process does one become part of the kingdom of God? (John 1:12)

9. What is the source of our being "children of God"? (1 John 3:1)

10. In Galatians 3:27 we read as many of you have been, "baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

a. In Baptism, God "clothes" the individual. In what does He clothe him? (Ephesians 4:24)

b. In Baptism, God accepts the individual. Into what does He accept him? (John 3:5)

c. In Baptism, God affects the church. How does He affect it? (Ephesians 5:25-26)

11. What happens to the walls that separate us in life when one joins the church of Jesus Christ?

---

Why?

---

According to Ephesians 2:14-15, 19, how does that happen?

---

12. List three separating walls which disappear in the church (Gal. 3:28).

---

13. List separating walls which still need to disappear from the church.

---

Expand and explain.

---

14. To whom do we belong? (Romans 14:8) and of what are we a part? (Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12)

---

Are we members of the "law" party or the "promise" party?

---

15. Who inherits the promise made to Abraham? (Titus 3:7)

---