

The Church Is United in Faith

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God provides salvation from sin through faith in Christ alone.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Galatians 3:1-26

Many television shows and movies portray a common theme in a variety of scenarios. One plot shows a wholesome teen skipping school to hang out with a bad influence and eventually engaging in an activity that threatens her good reputation. In another, an adoring husband continues to laugh off the “innocent” flirting of his coworker who eventually kisses him. In yet another, a humble man, full of integrity but with a failing business, unknowingly accepts a loan that implicates him in crimes he took no part in.

In spite of the variety, you still find yourself yelling at the screen for the same reason. The teen refuses to confide in her understanding parents and ask for help. The husband fails to explain the situation to his wife as soon as it happens. The business owner decides against consulting the board of his company and the authorities, even though he has clear proof of his innocence. Instead, these characters ignore the problem or try to cover it up, which ends up making the situation far worse than when it began.



Why do people try to cover up their mistakes rather than admit them and seek help?

Group Time

Point 1: Faith in Christ, not the law, is what justifies the sinner (Gal. 3:1-6).

¹ You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ² I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh? ⁴ Did you experience so much for nothing—if in fact it was for nothing? ⁵ So then, does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law? Or is it by believing what you heard— ⁶ just like Abraham who believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness?

As sinful human beings, we are prone to be fickle and foolish. We can all be so wrong about something even though we are so convinced we are right. We may even think we know better than God at times. In this we are no different than the Galatians. Paul had preached Christ crucified, and they had believed and received the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ. But now they were operating as if their works of the law were the key for their justification and their sanctification. How foolish were they? How foolish are we to ignore God's revealed truth?

Special Revelation refers to God's revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His _____, and through _____. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His _____ for creation, and His _____ of redemption.

The law was and still is an integral part of Jewish history and culture, a blessing from God to the people of Israel (Rom. 9:4), and subsequently to the world. To be counted among the people of God in the old covenant required observance of the law, including circumcision for males. Yet some Jews held this same expectation for those who would become Christians under the new covenant, and the Gentile Galatian believers were being tempted by this false teaching. To counter this, Paul pointed to Abraham, who preceded the law and was found righteous before God on the basis of his faith alone.



Why might people be tempted to base their salvation and relationship with God on their obedience to a set of laws?

Point 2: Faith in Christ, not the law, is what removes the curse of sin (Gal. 3:10-14).

¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed. ¹¹ Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith. ¹² But the law is not based on faith; instead, the one who does these things will live by them. ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. ¹⁴ The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The “all or nothing” concept is often referenced in sports training as a mantra for working hard. Dieting fads have also promoted this approach as necessary for losing weight. But this concept has never been more true than when used to describe the relationship between sinners and the Mosaic Law. The law of God depicts holiness—perfect obedience—as its standard of righteousness. And to fall short puts us under the law’s curse for lawbreakers—death.

 What are some ways people object to God’s standard of perfection and the curse of death for those who fall short?

The only reason salvation is a free gift, much less possible, for those who believe is because it cost Christ everything. The law that condemns us because we have failed to uphold it perfectly, He fulfilled (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, only He could remove the curse of sin from us, and He did so by becoming the curse for us as our substitute when He was crucified on a wooden cross (Gal. 3:13).

Imputation: When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ’s _____ was imputed to us. When God the Father looks at those who have _____ in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them.



Voices from Church History

“Through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied when God spares a sinner ... The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our Substitute died for us on the cross. However unpleasant this may sound to the ear of the natural man, it has ever been sweet to the ear of faith.”¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

Point 3: Faith in Christ, not the law, is what frees us from the bondage of sin (Gal. 3:21-26).

²¹ Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. ²³ Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. ²⁴ The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. ²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

Since the law cannot save and in fact curses sinners, the natural human response would be to forsake it altogether as outdated and restrictive. But the law itself is not contrary to God's promises—it works in conjunction with them (Gal. 3:21). Jesus solidified this when He stated that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, we shouldn't look to the law for salvation, but neither should we cast it off. Rather, we should use the law according to its ultimate purpose—to point us to our need for Christ to save us.



What are some ways the law points us to Jesus?

Only in Christ can people truly find themselves because sin has marred our humanity. Whether we have the law or not, we are already imprisoned under sin (Rom. 1–3). The commands of the law make this plain to us because we rebel against them again and again. Only through faith in Christ can we regain wholeness as image bearers of God and freedom from the bondage of sin. When we come to faith in Christ, we are free from sin and bound to Jesus (“in Christ”), we are no longer enemies of God but His adopted sons and daughters, and we are directed by the Holy Spirit to resist sin and pursue the righteousness that comes by faith.



What are some ways believers demonstrate their freedom from sin through faith in Christ?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Galatians 1:1–2:21

Paul began his Letter to the Galatians with a statement about Jesus having given Himself for our sins. Then he expressed the reason why Christ gave Himself for our sins—“to rescue us from this present evil age” (1:4). Today, some believers are trying to guard against falling into the trap of legalism and extremism (speaking things that may be true but doing so with hate rather than in love). But we must also guard against the dangerous pitfall on the other end of the spectrum, which is becoming too comfortable with the world and forgetting that having been “rescued” from it, we are here as Jesus’ ambassadors on a mission.

An effective way of maintaining a God-glorifying balance between legalism and license is to have a clear understanding of and continually abide in the precious truth that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. This truth is so vital that Paul would not yield even one moment in submission to the pressure to affirm the works of the law as a valid pathway for salvation. It is through the law that we have died to the law so that we might live, not for ourselves or for the world but for God (2:19). So like Paul, let us boldly declare through our lives and the sharing of the gospel that “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (2:20).



Do you feel like the way you live your life effectively communicates to the world around you that you treasure Christ above all else? Why or why not?



Voices from Church History

“To trust [Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you.”³

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Day 2: Read Galatians 3:1-9

In this passage, we see Christ crucified (v. 1), the Spirit received by faith (v. 2) and working miracles among the Galatians (v. 5), God the Father supplying the Spirit (v. 5), and Scripture foretelling God's justification of Gentiles by faith as He did Abraham (vv. 8-9). While it's clear that God the Father has been a main character in this redemption story, it's important to note that all three Persons of the Trinity have always existed and been integral to our creation and salvation from the beginning.

The Son and the Spirit were both active in creation with God the Father (Gen. 1:2,26-27; John 1:1-5). After the fall, God promised the coming of One, the Son incarnate, who would redeem what sin had destroyed (Gen. 3:15). In light of this salvation that was to come, God credited righteousness to His people who had faith, including Abraham. And the Spirit was present throughout the Old Testament speaking to God's people and equipping them to do God's will.



How does a greater knowledge of the Trinity's work in salvation and in our everyday lives benefit the Christian?

Day 3: Read Galatians 3:10-18

It's clear that God does not take His promises lightly. God is the epitome of truth—He is truth, and He is true to His Word, meaning that even centuries after the fact, He remains unchanging and will keep His promises.

This serves as a great comfort to the Christian, but not in a superficial or materialistic way. God never promised we would get that job, buy that car, find that spouse, conceive that baby, or be healed from that illness. But He did promise to be with us (Matt. 28:20), to complete the good work He started in us (Phil. 1:6), that we would never be separated from His love in Christ (Rom. 8:39), and so much more. The fact that Christ's work has paved the ways for us to now experience the honor of God's promises being fulfilled for us is a humbling sentiment, to say the least.



What are some of the promises of God from Scripture that you cling to?

Day 4: Read Galatians 3:19-26

The fact that the law is not contrary to God's promises but has aided in fulfilling them can be a difficult concept to grasp (Gal. 3:21). So many negative things came through the law. People trusted in God's law rather than God. It cursed us and imprisoned us under sin. How could all that be a part of God's plan?

It's understandable for us to have that same question with respect to the various trials in our lives. All those gut-wrenching tragedies that seem unspeakable don't seem to add up to anything good. What could God possibly do with that? When answers are scarce and the perspective that hindsight usually produces is delayed, we can find great comfort in remembering our Savior. We can approach Christ with our greatest hurts and deepest wounds because He was a man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3). In the midst of sadness, we can trust that though we may not understand, God will use our suffering for good, with the cross as our prime example (Rom. 8:28-30). The agonizing death of Christ made it possible for the free gift of God's grace to abound for many.



Do you tend to run to God for comfort during trying times or to other lesser things? Why?

Day 5: Read Galatian 3:27–6:18

Trusting in the works of the law, or good deeds, to justify only places ourselves back in bondage. But when we use the freedom to which we have been called in Christ not as an opportunity for sin but to serve one another, in this we actually fulfill the law (5:13-15). In Christ, we have been given the power to walk by the Spirit and say no to sin (5:16). There was no choice before. Sin was our master. God doesn't warn against sin because He is a cosmic killjoy. He does it because He is holy. He loves us and knows that however gratifying it is in the moment, sin can never satisfy and can only devour. Therefore, fulfillment is found in living by the Spirit. Every soul craves the wholeness found only in God, whether he or she is aware of it or not.



Which fruit of the Spirit would you like to grow in practicing more?

