

New Creation Teaching Ministry

Galatians Week 4

From last week:

- Last time we saw how persuasive was the argument of the teachers who had come down from Jerusalem.
 - They had everything on their side: chapter and verse of the Law; connections with the ‘mother church’ and the apostles who walked and talked with Jesus; the Lord’s own brother as the leader of the church there; centuries of cultural tradition and practice that had shaped culture, conscience and tradition; and the visible ‘establishment’ of the Temple and the synagogue system. Against this, Paul had only the ‘bare Word’ (i.e. Christ, and him crucified).
- We also saw that the issue (of eating and drinking) was finally related to justification: i.e. my righteous standing before God depends on what I do or do not do in relation to the Law.

Galatians 2:15-21

But The Gospel Speaks Thus: ‘By Works of the Law Will No Flesh Be Justified’!

(1) The principle of Gal. 2:16 is repeated in other places. See Gal. 3:10f.; 5:4 (cf. Rom. 3:20) for example. The other way of putting it is in Gal. 2:21: if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died in vain’.

- The Jerusalem Bible translates Rom. 3:20 helpfully. ‘So then, no human being can be found upright at the tribunal of God by keeping the Law; all that the Law does is to tell us what is sinful’.
- There is never any justification in the law. The matter is not one simply of the ‘boundary marker’ issues, but anything by which we say we have something to present before God, something that is true of ourselves.
- To keep the whole law does not earn anything from God, it is what should have been the case anyway!
 - Paul will have much to say on the relation between grace and law later, but here there is simply (negative) equation ‘works of the law = condemnation before God’ contrasted with ‘faith in Christ = justification before God’.
 - But the point to be observed is that no one can or does keep the Law! “The Law requires perfect obedience toward God, and it damns those who do not yield such obedience. Now it is certain that no one yields this obedience or even can; nevertheless this is what God wants. Therefore the Law does not justify; it condemns...the Law does nothing but accuse consciences and manifest sin, which is dead without the Law.’ (Luther, L.W. Vol. 25 p. 148).

Justification is Solely on the Basis of Faith in the Crucified Christ.

(1) Justification is at the heart of the letter. Justification is drawn from the language of the law court and is thus forensic (e.g. Deut. 25:1ff.). It relates to the declaration of one's standing before God, the Judge of all the earth.

- One is given a righteous standing before God, by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16a).

(2) But note well: the basis of the justified standing is Christ's role as the crucified one.

- See Gal. 2:20 cf. the link between justification and the sacrifice of Christ in Rom. 3:21ff.

- Justification and the remission of sins are two sides of the one event. There can be no just verdict of 'justified' if sins have not been dealt with.

§ Psalm 65:3 NIV 'When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions'; ESV 'When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions'; JB 'Our faults overwhelm us, but you blot them out'.

- This is to be understood in terms of the co-crucifixion of the believer with Christ, as in Gal. 5:24; 6:14; Rom. 6:2, 6-9; Col. 2:20; 3:1-4; 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:14.
- Justification is not by being 'alive to the Law', but dying to the Law! Luther (L. W. Vol. 26 p. 156-157)
- "All believers in Christ have 'died in relation to sin' (Rom. 6:2, 11), but the point stressed here is that, at the same time, they have 'died in relation to law'...Paul...no longer lives under the power of the law; he has been released from its dominion and has entered into new life" (F. F. Bruce, p. 142f.).
 - So also the exegesis of Paul's point in Rom. 7:1ff. where the best understanding of it is in relation to the contrast between being bound to the Law and now married to Christ. Normally in Jewish society, the woman had no option open to her to leave a marriage, so she was bound to her husband as long he lived. Husbands could put away their wives, but not vice versa. The Law, Paul argues, will never let us go or give us our freedom...and he will never die! In the illustration Paul is making the point that therefore there was no way out of being 'bound' to the Law except that the old 'husband' (i.e. the Law) died, or she died to her husband....but in Christ a death has taken place in which we have died to the Law, and now are remarried to Christ.. so that even though the Law (and all that it stood for in terms of Jewish identity and practice, for example) is still 'alive' (in the sense that it was still active in the world and all its demands were still vibrant in a believer's ear) we have in fact been released from that marriage to the Law and married to Christ in his resurrection. The old marriage to the Law was fruitless, but now we are married to Christ that we might be fruit for God. The emphasis is on the woman being bound under the Jewish economy without hope of release...but that now the church is married to a new husband in Christ, in whom the Law (who would never let the wife go free) has been put to death.
- We live in this new relation 'by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me'. Take the pronouns *personally*.

(3) The emphasis for us to take away is this: *we are justified in Christ, for eternity!*

Galatians 3:1-5

The Gift of the Spirit: The Goal for the Nations

(1) In this chapter of Galatians, Paul starts by drawing attention to the experience of the Galatian believers, and then moves into the biblical exposition underpinning it, particularly by dealing with God's dealings with Abraham.

- We will come to this in due course, but in order to understand the importance of the passage before us, we must pick up a couple of things from the next paragraph or so, and see where they come from in the Old Testament.

(2) The goal of the Abrahamic Covenant (reiterated to Isaac & Jacob etc.) was the blessing of the nations (see Gen. 12:3 cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 etc.)

- There were other promises attached to the covenant as well (e.g. blessing for Abraham himself; many descendants; land; kings coming from him), but in all the theme of the covenant could be summarised as 'blessed to be a blessing'.
 - The nations were always the object of God's plan, with Abraham and his seed (Israel and ultimately the Messiah) being used as the instruments to bring his grace to the ends of the earth.

§ And in Romans 9-11 even the hardening of the Israel of Paul's day to the word of the gospel was for the blessing of the nations!

- Jesus understood that his death was not only for God's Old Testament people, but for the Gentiles (e.g. John 10:16 cf. 11:52). Hence his great commission to the apostles in Matt. 28:19ff.

(3) Paul knew that his preaching of the gospel was for the blessing of the nations so that they might come to the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 15:16; 16:25-27)

- In Romans 4, he expounds this in terms of God's justification of Abraham by faith.
 - Faith was credited to him as righteousness while he was still uncircumcised, so that righteousness could be credited to the (uncircumcised) nations on the basis of faith (Rom. 4:10-12)
 - Paul also takes up this point in the latter part of Galatians 3 (e.g. Gal. 3:8)
 - § This is part of an extended contrast between the blessing of justification by faith and the curse of living under works of the law.

(4) However, the blessing of the nations *does not terminate* on the matter of justification.

- That Jews as well as Gentiles may be justified before God by grace through faith is wonderful enough.
 - It means that there are no 'inferior' people of God: all are acquitted by faith, and all are fully accepted by God on the basis of the completed work of the son. In his Son's Cross, God has removed the barrier of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles, so that there would be one new body (Eph. 2:11-18)
- But the justified standing of the believer is not the final or only goal of God's redemptive purpose. It is the means to the goal, which is the gift of the Spirit!

- Peter himself saw this in the case of Israel (see Acts 2:38), and Paul knows it was the case of the Galatians.
 - In the Galatians' own experience, hearing with faith was the key to receiving the Spirit (Gal. 3:2)
 - But Paul goes on to expound the gift of the Spirit as the goal of the Abrahamic blessing (Gal. 3:13-14).

The Gift of the Spirit: Creational Restoration

(1) If we were to ask why is the gift of the Spirit the goal one of the answers would be simply, 'Because that is what we were created for'.

- In the account of creation, we are animated dust.
- In the life of Jesus, the second Adam and true man, we see that he could do nothing except by the Spirit. Conceived by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit, led by the Spirit; empowered by the Spirit, went to the cross by the Spirit etc.
 - And the purpose of his ascension was that he might pour out the Spirit on 'all flesh': i.e. male or female, young men, old men, Jews and Gentiles!
 - The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father poured out through the incarnate, resurrected and ascended Son. He is the same Spirit who indwelt Jesus, who come to us from the Father through Jesus!

(2) This gift of the Spirit is the evident cause of rejoicing for Peter on the occasion of his preaching in the house of Cornelius

- See Acts 10:34ff.
 - Note the connection: while he was preaching the word of the cross and the forgiveness of sins...the Holy Spirit fell on them. Works of the law or hearing with faith?
 - So for Cornelius and his household, and so for the Gentiles in Galatia. They had received the Spirit in the hearing of the word of the Cross: Jesus portrayed as crucified.
- And see the response of the Jerusalem Church in Acts 11:16ff.; 15:8-9.
 - See the connection between forgiveness (one side of the matter of justification) and the reception of the Spirit, especially in Acts 15:8-9.
 - This is why we often consciously experience the depths of the fullness when we hear the word of the Cross preached to us (or when we preach it)!

(3) So in receiving the Spirit, we are restored to the state in which we should have been: walking by the Spirit, not according to the Flesh (about which Paul says much later on).

(4) And this leads us to consider another matter, which will become more prominent as we continue: without the Spirit there is neither the desire nor the ability to keep the law.

- Paul was accused of antinomianism, because of the freedom of grace (e.g. Rom. 3:8, 31; 6:1 cf. Gal. 2:17)
- The answer to the question of antinomianism and the believer's relationship to the law lies in the fullness of the Spirit (as he expounds in Gal. 5...see for example Gal. 5:16).
 - See also Romans 8:4 'in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'. Note the passive sense of this, as in the fruit.

The Gift of the Spirit: Essential For Life

(1) All this may be brought home to us, by simply asking, 'What would we have or know if we did not have the Spirit?' Or better 'Who would you know?', since the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who leads us to *know* Jesus and to *know* the Father.

- Would we have the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, through the washing of regeneration; would we have ever come to the conviction of sin in the first place; would we have a new heart and a new spirit within us; would we love to have Jesus as our Lord; would we know God as Abba; intercession of the Spirit in our hearts; the love of God shed abroad; the hope world to come; the seal of the promised inheritance, the pledge of all that is ours in Christ; the gifts for service and proclamation; the power to overcome sin; the love of the cross; the adoration of God; the exaltation in worship; etc.
 - If we did not have the Spirit, we would have nothing! We would still be in our sins, and under the condemnation of the law, without God and without hope in this world.

(2) And how has he come to us? By hearing works of the law or hearing with faith?

- The expression of Gal. 3:2 is emphatic in the Greek, 'by works of the law did you receive the Spirit, or by hearing with faith'?
 - For the Galatians to run counter to their own experience in this was unthinkable. It was akin to being 'bewitched'...i.e. beyond rational explanation.

(3) But what is so for them, is so for us. What works of the law did God demand of you to receive the Spirit? What works of the law does he continue to demand?

- Do we believe that such and inestimable gift comes simply by hearing with faith?
- Go on hearing the word of the gospel, and go on being filled!
 - All for the sake of the nations.

Galatians 3:10-14

The Place of the Law

(1) Paul is going to give a fuller treatment of the nature and function of the law a little later (beginning at Gal. 3:19, 'Why then the Law?'), and we will come to this in due course.

- We must be aware that much of what Paul is writing about has already been preached and discussed at length with the Galatians. In many ways, the material here is like theological bullet points, to bring to remembrance the things that had already been proclaimed among them. Not least in the matter of the 'curse' to which we will turn.

(2) Paul uses the word 'Law' in a variety of ways. Sometimes it refers to the Old Testament (or part of it), e.g. Acts 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21; 1 Cor. 9:8f.; 14:21, 34, etc.; often it refers to the gift of the law as a written code, given to Israel via the Mosaic covenant on Mt Sinai, e.g. Rom. 9:4; Gal. 3:17; cf. Rom. 2:12-14, 17, 27; 1 Cor. 9:21; and thus it can refer to specific commandments, e.g. Rom. 7:7; sometimes it can refer to a principle of operation e.g. Rom. 8:2 cf. 3:27; 7:23, 25; and often the word 'law' is linked

negatively with the word 'works' as in 'works of the law' e.g. Rom. 3:20f., 28; Gal. 2:16 cf. 2:21; 3:5 cf. 5:4 etc.

- In this passage, the term is used in a number of these ways, overlapping in meaning.
- (3) Unfailingly, however, the law of itself is good (e.g. Rom. 7:12, 14, 22), and it is clear that love is the fulfilment of the law (e.g. Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14 cf. Matt. 22:36-40)
- Thus the problem is not Law per se, but what happens when fallen humanity encounters the Law (or *vice versa*).
 - The Law brings wrath (Rom. 4:15); defines sin as transgression (Rom. 5:13) and in actuality increases sin (Rom. 5:20 cf. 7:8f.).
- (4) There is close relationship between doing 'works of the law' and living in the 'flesh'
- e.g. the parallelism between Gal. 3:2 and 3:3; the force of the allegory in Gal. 4:22ff.; the 'dogs' and 'evil doers' who want to put confidence in the flesh, particularly in the matter of circumcision in Phil. 3:2ff.
 - The 'flesh' will present itself in religious garb by doing deeds of seeming obedience and righteousness, but the end is self-aggrandisement through self-justification.
- (5) The law, when in contact with fallen humanity in its sin, only commands 'doing', not 'believing'.
- When we are justified we do 'works' (see Eph. 2:10), but not the other way around ('Christians do not become righteous by doing righteous works; but once they have been justified by faith in Christ, they do righteous works' Luther, Vol. 26 p. 256).
 - Law-way and faith-way (or better, grace-way) are radically different.
 - See the 'for' connecting Gal. 3:10 with 3:9. The blessing comes through faith...for the curse comes through works of the law. Same point is made in Gal. 3:11, '*for* the righteous by faith shall live'. In Gal. 5:1 'law way' is called the 'yoke of slavery', which leads to being in effect, 'severed from Christ'.
 - Problem for us. To be good at something you **do** it (e.g. piano, surgery, growing mushrooms, administering the company). In the plan of God to be righteous (justified) you **believe** something, without doing anything.

The Nature of the Curse

(1) Paul uses the word *curse* here in different contexts: (a) Curse of relying on works of the law (3:10); (b) the 'curse of the law', and (c) Christ as becoming 'curse' for us (3:13).

- These act as theological bullet points to remind the Galatians of what he has said previously.
- And we notice the universality: the law and its curse is not something that can be handled by more education so that we would appreciate it more, or more detailed precepts on the best way to use the law! It is a curse, from which we need to be **redeemed**. It is also universal. Christ redeemed 'us' from the curse of the law, but here Paul is not speaking about Jews only! Whole race in some sense under the curse of the law, and the yoke of works of the law.

(2) The three overlap, but are not identical.

- 3:10 'as many as are of works of the law' ...i.e. relying on works of the law are cursed. Why? Implication of the quote from Deut. 27:26 is that if one relies on works of the law, we will never be able to fulfil the Law. Compare with Gal. 5:3.
 - Summation of the law is love. None has loved God and neighbour with all might and strength for whole of life! E.g. rich young ruler.
 - Issue is not outward observance but the heart obedience ('circumcised heart in Deut.), which cannot be changed by external matters (see, for example, the discussion about food etc. in Mark 7:22f.)
- 3:13 'the curse of the law' i.e. more generally. Old Testament curses have a fulsome description
 - Old Testament covenant curses were proclaimed from Mt. Ebal (Deut. 27:26) and cover every area of life should they be brought into effect (Deut. 28:15-68), just as the blessing would cover all areas of human endeavour (e.g. Deut. 28:1-14).
- Christ became curse for us (more below), but he entered into all of our failure to keep the law (and thus our guilt), as well as all the curses of God as the representative Israelite. He fulfils Deut. 27:26 Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

Christ as Curse For Us

(1) Overall, the curse is contrasted with the blessing. The end point is that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles by faith.

- The idea of blessing in the Old Testament has a lot of interconnected ideas such as peace with God, rest, fruitfulness, security, communion with God etc. It is linked to his favour being upon us, by having his presence with us (e.g. the Aaronic blessing of Numb. 6:22f.)
- Here, the blessing is in the gift of the Spirit, who brings all these things to us and assures us that they are so...by faith.
 - This cannot be separated from our union with Christ in whom we find all the blessings of God (Eph. 1:3 cf. Gal. 3:14)

(2) The curse of the law of commandments against us (as in Col. 2:13ff.) lies in the guilt of our sin, and therefore Christ had to enter the place of guilt, under judgment.

(3) 'Cursed is every one' does not refer to crucifixion (not practiced in Israel), but to the fact that one hung on a tree was there because they had been found guilty, and suffered death as the punishment for guilt. This one was thus 'cursed' by the guilt of their sin.

- Christ is hung on tree (*xulon* = timber, wood)...Christ as curse for us, as he bore our sin and its guilt.
 - Luther (L.W. Vol. 26 p. 277, 280ff.)