

**Wednesday, October 29, 2020**

**SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)**

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**TITLE: The Reversal Surprise**

It would seem like we've had a lot of flip-flops in our history. I'm not talking about the history of the Bible; I'm saying us as a society. For example, for many years, we ate whole eggs. But then doctors said they're dangerous to our health, so only eat egg whites. Now we're back to eating whole eggs. Red meat was once the enemy of the state, and now it is being promoted again as good for your health. Coffee was once thought to be a link to cancer and heart disease, but we now know that it's loaded with antioxidants, so we've had another flip-flop.

But what about the other way? Have there been things that were deemed as good, and now we realize they're bad? Think about cigarettes. In the 1950s, nearly 50% of all people smoked. The cigarette companies used physicians on their advertisements, and even physicians said smoking was good for keeping your throat clear. From as early as the 1600s, up until even the 1800s, opium was used to treat things from meningitis, to menstrual cramps, to yellow fever. It was even spoon-fed to babies. But as we now know, opium has all sorts of negative effects, including addiction.

These are some examples of flip-flops in our history, some for good and some for bad. But I don't know if there's ever been a bigger flip-flop than one we find in the Bible. What is that flip-flop? What is that reversal? That's what we want to talk about today. So I encourage you, if you have a Bible, to open it up to Galatians Chapter Three. We'll be picking it up in verse 10.

In the previous 9 verses, Paul has continued his teaching that Salvation comes by grace through faith alone. The old way of trying to earn Salvation through following the Law, and by human efforts, was meaningless. That would never do the job. Paul has said over and over again, even in the first 5 verses, what is it that saves us? How do we get the Holy Spirit? Is it by works? Absolutely not - it is purely a gift. And then in the last 4 verses, Paul has also said something quite scandalous. He said that Salvation is not just for the children of Abraham. Salvation is for *everyone*. The Gospel is inclusive to all people. But as we discovered, the offer of Salvation is where the inclusion ends. Only those who respond in faith to God's offer of Salvation receive it. And that's where we pick it up in Galatians Chapter 3, verse 10 (ESV):

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Paul is just continuing his case that works of the flesh can never save. They are “under a curse”. That is very strong language. The road of religion is filled with works. The way of legalism is built upon what you can do in your human flesh. The problem is, it can never save us. That's why

Paul says, for those who think that playing the game of religion, those who want to make Salvation a matter of works - you're under a curse.

Let me explain it like this: imagine that you are in a class, but from the moment you step in the class, the teacher says, "I want you to understand the rules. You've got homework every day that is due promptly at 8:00 AM in the morning. But just know that the moment that you miss even one problem, you fail the course. In fact, you have a failing grade when you begin the course. Your only way out is to get 100% on every test, every piece of homework, every day. Oh, and by the way, your class never ends." You are cursed. It's like a bad episode of the Twilight Zone. But this is no Twilight Zone - this is a picture of how it really is.

We all, according to Ephesians 2, "are dead in our trespasses and sins". There is nothing that we can do to bring ourselves back to life. A corpse is a corpse, because it's a corpse. It's dead. It has no life, and a corpse cannot revive itself. Spiritually speaking, we are all corpses. We were brought into life with a sin nature. Adam's sin was imputed upon us. His sin was credited to our account. Our only hope is to break the cycle through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, and he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, to do them." In other words, if you want to get that A+ - you have to get 100% on all tests, and quizzes, and homework your entire life. But the reality is, we're under a curse, because it's not possible. We cannot treat the Law and God's holiness as a Chinese buffet. We do not get to pick and choose where we will be graded, and where we will not. God says, "Here's the standard, and that standard is Me." If you're going to play the game of religion, and you want to pass the class based on your efforts, then you fail. And friend, we all fail in this class.

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We all are destined to fail in the game of religion. If Salvation comes by our own efforts, we are doomed to fail. That's what Paul has just said in Galatians 3:10. And he's just going to continue with his case in verse 11.

<sup>11</sup> Now, it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

Paul says it is self-evident that this is true. "No one is justified before God"; in other words, you will not be found blameless, if you are trying to keep the Law. Don't believe me? Just look at people. Just consider your own life. The evidence is abundantly clear. We are all sinners. We cannot help it. It is by our nature we are this way.

Consider Paul's words in Romans 3:9-20:

"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

<sup>11</sup> no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one.”

<sup>13</sup> “Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

<sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

<sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery,

<sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.”

<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

Paul wrote this concept to both the Galatians and the Romans, and there's a lot of similarity at times between these two letters. God wants us to really understand our own depravity, but also God's capacity. “No one seeks after God”, Paul writes in Romans 3. In other words, there are no seekers who are looking for God. It's true they are in the dark, fumbling around looking for something, but they're not looking for God. But God, who is a missional God, is looking for them. Paul writes, “No one is righteous. No. Not even one. All have turned aside. They have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one.” Paul's indictment of mankind is frightening, but it's exactly right.

So, coming back to Galatians 3, verse 11, he says no one can do it; instead, the righteous – those who are declared righteous - become that way by faith. This points right back to what he has just said about Abraham being saved by faith, and not by works.

Paul goes on in verse 12.

<sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

Paul makes a clear distinction again that the Law is not the same thing as faith. The Law is the do's and the don'ts, that no one can live out perfectly. Faith, however, is all about what someone else can do, or has done. Faith, in this context, is pointing to the assurance that God has provided a way. That faith is based upon what Jesus Christ has done. Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, when he says, “The one who does them shall live by them.”

What that means is they shall experience eternal life if they can actually fulfill the Law, but no one can. So Paul said, it's by faith. Well, faith in who? Verses 13 and 14:

<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

You see, Christ was the only solution. Our faith is in Christ alone. It's not blind faith. It's not a misappropriated faith. No, it is faith in something we are sure of. Christ redeemed us. "Redeemed" is a term that means to be purchased back from. We were purchased back from our slavery to sin. In cartoons, they often have a soul being purchased back from Satan. Well Satan doesn't own our souls. We may have allegiance to him as nonbelievers, but our soul is simply purchased back from our slavery to sin.

Jesus Christ, the God-man, the perfect one, would become cursed for us. He would be cursed, because he hung on a tree. First Peter 2:24 (NASB) says, "and He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed."

Paul said in Second Corinthians 5:21 (ESV), "For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Paul again points right back to what he is just said in the previous 9 verses. We receive a blessing that was promised to Abraham because of his faith. And when we become justified - in other words - declared righteous before God - at that moment, we receive His Spirit.

Friend, this is good news. Because of what Paul has written here, we know that the Gospel matters before our conversion, at our conversion, and after our conversion. We must daily preach the Gospel to ourselves. There is nothing that we do to earn Salvation. When we look back at our conversion, we must always remember that truth. We didn't earn that. We didn't manipulate that. God didn't give us Salvation because of the color of our skin. It wasn't because of our last name. It wasn't because we went to a certain church. **It wasn't because of anything we did, but rather what God did. The Gospel is for everyone. That is the ultimate reversal in the way of mankind.** We like to play God. We like to pretend like we have more power and control in all we do. But God says the works that you do won't save you. Instead, I will do it for you. So, **we much preach the Gospel to ourselves daily.**

**Second, we must cling to the cross of Christ.** As my father once said, that the cross is far more than just a piece of jewelry, or a piece of artwork we hang on our walls. The cross of Christ is what frees us from our sins. It reminds us of our depravity and how we daily need to remain close to the cross. **When we remember these two truths: that the Gospel matters every single day before, at, and after our conversion, and the cross of Christ must be near to our hearts, we will daily be conformed to the image of our Savior, and we will continually be reaching out to the lost with the one true Gospel, because it is the only thing that can save.**

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N: Now, let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. The Gospel is offered to everyone. But it doesn't save everyone. Explain that.

C: Well, not everyone wants to take that gift, because it is a gift. If they don't want it - and that's, you know - how can God send people to Hell? Well, He really doesn't. People make that choice. There are people that do not want to have anything to do with God. And so for God, the most loving thing to do is to let them go. I mean, that has to be extremely difficult, but He does,

because that's what they want, you know?

A: Remember that old saying that people used to say - I don't hear it so much anymore - "I don't want to go to Heaven, because none of my friends will be there."

C: Yeah. Well like Christopher Hitchens - I always liked Christopher Hitchens. There was something about him. I just thought he seemed like he was kind of a sweet person, and kind of a lot of fun, but he said, "You don't understand. I don't want it. I understand it - I don't want it." And that made me extremely sad. Because of course, I always feel that burden, but it is what it is. People don't want it, and you - God can't force it on him, and neither can I, so yeah.

N: It's one of those unique discussions in Christianity that we can become pretty dogmatic about, you know - people's destination to Hell, or people's destination to Heaven - whether it's predestination, or whether it's people going to Hell by their choice, or God's sending them. At the end of the day, I think we need to remember that God's ways are not our ways. Somehow, He is in this process of saving whom He chooses. Also, we respond freely. But also, it's my point is this, I think we've got to be careful about not becoming too dogmatic, and trying just to lump ourselves in a camp, but simply saying, "This is what I think God teaches, but we know that God's ways are above our ways." And so we trust Him even in the mystery, and that's part of one of the reasons why I like God so much, is because He is God and I'm not. I'm not going to figure it all out. And there is a unique system that He has, that I don't have to figure out, and I don't have to explain either. But also in this system of God's plan of Salvation, we talk about grace, and that's something I think we really struggle with as Christians, and just as people, because it's so foreign to us, and it's foreign to religion. It's so important for us to understand the depth of God's grace, but grace doesn't do away with the Law. What is the purpose of the Law for us today?

A: To protect us from ourselves.

C: Well, I think it reveals God's holiness for one; it defines sin. None of us are ever going to measure up, and it confirms our need to be separate from sin.

N: Yeah. The Law, you know - here in this text, it reminds us - the Law is there to remind us of our sinfulness. And I think it's still very valuable today, to remind us how in need of a Savior we are. We always need Jesus Christ. It's not like we get Him, and then off we go - we need Him every single day. And the Law, it's a guidebook too. I mean, there is a good way of living, and the Bible does prescribe it for us. And so when we do that, we avoid a lot of pain and a lot of discomfort. And so it's beneficial for us on many levels. But when we talk about grace, and we talk about God's sovereignty, and all of these pieces of the puzzle, we also talk about preaching the Gospel to ourselves. How do you guys go about preaching the Gospel to yourself daily?

C: Well, I know I need grace daily, because every day, my mind, and where it chooses to go, is a reminder of how ugly sin is. Because some of the stuff I come up with - and I was at Jesus

Camp this weekend, right - and it wasn't good. I need God's grace daily. Nothing that I do makes any difference. It's all just filthy rags. I need grace.

A: Yeah. A hundred percent - feel exactly the same way. I wasn't at Jesus Camp this weekend, but everything else - I knew better.

N: Yeah, I think when we remember God's grace, and why we have it, it transforms us daily. And I think there's a tension too. There's that part of us that goes back to who we were before Christ. We remember it. We remember our own depravity; we struggle with it. And if we're not careful, we can actually give a foothold to Satan, to take us to a place that we shouldn't go. So we've got to remember who we are apart from Christ - sinners in need of a Savior. But also, we remember, because of God's grace, we are new creations found in Christ. He redeems our past, and he puts us on a pathway forward that is unlike any other. That is the power of God's grace. And that is why we share it with people who are far from God.