



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 3: 1-14

Spring 2021

"Bewitched"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in the Book of Galatians and we are looking at chapter 3 this morning. And we're going to take a lengthy passage, verses 1 through 14. But it is a complete passage and I want to deal with it all in one shot. So, Galatians 3, beginning with verse 1,

**3** You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? **2** This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? **3** Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? **4** Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? **5** So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

**6** Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. **7** Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. **8** The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” **9** So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

**10** For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to

perform them." <sup>11</sup> Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup> However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." <sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"— <sup>14</sup> in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3: 1-14

*(Message)* In 1975 a Dutchman entered the Rijksmuseum armed with a bread knife, went to Rembrandt's masterpiece, *The Night Watch*, and began slashing. When he was finally subdued he explained that he was only doing the LORD's work. The director of the museum disagreed. He called the man a lunatic. Others agreed. He was placed in an asylum.

Something similar happened in Galatia. Men from Jerusalem came there and wrecked the Gospel with what amounted to a bread knife—a ceremony, circumcision, saying it was 'necessary for salvation'. They claimed they were only restoring the Gospel to its original meaning and doing the LORD's work. And many young believers in Galatia were swayed by them.

Paul was amazed at their gullibility. What these men of the Law were doing was defacing the greatest work in the universe. When Christ died He said, "It is finished." Nothing can be added to what He has done. What these Judaizers were doing to the Gospel was as maniacal as slashing a masterpiece.

And the men of Galatia should have known better. Paul said that. He began chapter 3, "You foolish Galatians." Now the Greek text has, "O foolish Galatians." The emotion in the rebuke here is expressed in that little word, "O". Their fascination with the Law was something new and completely irrational. That's the sense of the word "foolish".

The Law was never given as a way of salvation. It was given for the purpose of exposing sin and showing people their need of salvation, (Paul explains that later in verse 19). Its function has been compared to that of a mirror. A mirror helps us see a smudge of dirt on our face but it doesn't cleanse it. It only exposes the problem so that we can then wash it away. And that's what the Law does. It exposes sin so that we can see the problem and flee to the Savior for cleansing.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "Trying to save oneself by keeping the Law is like a person who looks in a mirror, sees the dirt, and then tries to remove it by rubbing the mirror on his face." Now if we saw a person doing that, we would think that he was foolish, or worse, he was out of his mind. Whatever the word or description, it would be completely irrational. That's how Paul describes the Galatians.

But he knew these Galatians. He didn't think they were crazy, so the only explanation that he could give for their bizarre behavior was that they had been "bewitched". It was as though some character, like the fictional Svengali with his hypnotic eyes, had entered their churches and put them under his spell. So the idea has been given, explained here, of what he's saying as, "Who has put the evil eye on you?" Who has hypnotized you? Now Paul, of course, is being facetious. But the Galatians' conduct was so preposterous that it was as though a band of sorcerers had entered their churches and cast a spell over them.

But the Law, or legalistic systems, are attractive to people. They naturally feel the need or desire 'to do something' to merit God's favor and blessing. They feel it's needed, and they desire to do that. So, Paul asks, who has bewitched you?

Well this begins the next major portion of the Book of Galatians, in which Paul defends the Gospel as the doctrine of faith against the false gospel of works. He's been defending his apostleship. Now he defends his message.

Paul does that here with a series of questions. The first, 'Who put a spell on you?', which he follows with the statement, "...before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified?"

Paul had taught the Galatians well. He explained the death of Christ to them so clearly that it was as if the crucifixion had been publicly portrayed to them, 'displayed on a billboard'. They learned the meaning and the importance of the cross of Christ. He had taught them well.

When Paul went to Corinth he said he resolved to know nothing "except Jesus Christ and Him crucified", (1Cor 2:2), because that is the essence of the Good News of salvation. He didn't obscure the message, the Gospel, with non-essentials. He stayed with the essence of the message in Corinth, in Galatia—wherever he went. He made the message clear, which is, 'the work of salvation is finished'. Christ finished it on the cross, and there is nothing left for us to do but receive it. Nothing need be added. Adding to the Gospel is like someone entering the Louvre, in Paris, with a Sharpie and scribbling a mustache on the *Mona Lisa*—to improve it—it's foolish.

So to break the hypnotic spell the legalizers had cast over the Galatians, Paul asked another question in verse 2, which, if they answered it correctly, would prove his point, "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" Now he asked essentially the same question in verse 5, "So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" In other words, look back on your own experience. What works of the Law did you do to receive the Holy Spirit that you did receive? And, of course, the answer to that is, "None at all".

Just like Cornelius and his house full of Gentiles, in Acts chapter 10, they were saved apart from the Law through faith in Christ. Cornelius wasn't circumcised. He was baptized only after he was saved. At the moment of faith, he had the Holy Spirit, that whole company of Gentiles in his house had the Holy Spirit. He and they were justified. He had everything. And so did these Galatians. In fact, their reception of the Holy Spirit, Paul says, was confirmed with miracles. What greater proof did they need that salvation is through faith alone and not by the works of the Law—not by the deeds that we do. They had the proof of their own experience.

And so having begun with the Holy Spirit through faith, Paul asks them in verse 3, how they could imagine that perfection could be gained by the flesh, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" —that is, by your own efforts? Now "being perfected" here, doesn't refer to sanctification—the process by which the Holy Spirit actually changes us, renews the inner man after the image of Christ, and enables us to live holy lives. Rather, Paul is speaking here of justification—that's the subject of the epistle here. Justification of believers, their legal standing before God—what we have discussed in the past. It is the believer's position of righteousness before God, a position of perfection in God's sight. He sees us as righteous, like Christ is righteous.

Now based on that legal position of forgiveness and acceptance with God, God promises to finish the work in the reality of our experience, in the reality of our life; He will glorify us and we will be perfected. But until then, and presently, the believer in Jesus Christ is considered by God to have Christ's righteousness and is fully accepted by Him.

We stand before Him, and in His eyes, as perfect. Not because of anything we've done, but what Christ has done. And we're clothed in that righteousness. So Paul was asking the Galatians, 'How they were going to complete what God had already completed? How were they going to establish a better standing with Him than the one that God had already given them?'

The Judaizers had come along and taught the Galatians that there were two steps to salvation, 'So this is how you improve upon things', they were saying. 'This is how you complete what's begun. We begin with faith.' They acknowledge that. They preach that you must believe, you must believe in Jesus Christ. They seem to have been orthodox in that regard. But then they added something else—that these Galatians needed to be circumcised. So their message was one of 'faith plus works'. Paul answers, 'How foolish to think that we can add anything to the perfect work of God. It is one step. It is faith alone, which is really, simply receiving God's work of salvation.'

Warren Wiersbe was for years the minister at the Moody Church in Chicago. He illustrated this point from the experience of natural birth. He said, "When a normal child is born he has all that he needs for life. Nothing need be added." When the child of God is born into God's family, he has all that he needs spiritually. Nothing need be added. All that is necessary is that the child have food, exercise, and cleansing that he may grow into maturity. "It would be strange," he wrote, "if parents had to take the child to the doctor at one month to receive ears, at two months to receive toes, and so on." Well, that's really what Paul is getting at. We are complete at birth. We have everything we need, and we are sons of God at birth—full family members. Can't do anything to add to that.

Just as a child is a son or daughter of his or her parents at the moment of physical birth, so too, at the new birth, we are God's spiritual children. We don't have to wait for some process to be completed before we become acceptable and accepted into God's family, any more than a natural child has to do that. We are complete in every way at the moment we are born again. We can't improve upon God's work of salvation—can't do better than God has done in His grace. We can only receive it, (receive Christ's finished work), through faith. Now that's what the Gospel is about, that's what the Gospel requires—faith alone—no additions.

The Galatians had originally believed that, confidently. We know they believed it confidently because Paul says they even 'suffered' for it. That's what he says in verse 4. And in verse 5 he adds what we saw, that the truth was confirmed in their lives with "miracles". So he asks here in verse 4, 'Was all that in vain? Did you suffer so much for nothing?' 'Were they going to lose the fruit that they had gained from suffering for the Gospel by turning away from the Gospel?'

God wants His people to profit from their experiences in life. We know, 'Everything works together for good'; Paul assures us of that in Romans 8:28. And all kinds of things come into our lives, in various ways, various kinds of things. We pass through hardship, we pass through blessings, but it's all for a purpose. And that purpose is that we learn of Him, and we grow in grace and knowledge, our faith is strengthened,

we are matured. We're blessed through the experiences of life that God brings to us. And God wants His people to profit from that, as I say.

Paul didn't want these Galatians to lose what they had profited from. He didn't want them to lose all that they had gained. He didn't want this experience they had, (specifically here, that of suffering for the faith, that of going through the trials that they had experienced because of their conviction in the faith), to be in vain. And he didn't believe that it would be. He adds, "If indeed it was in vain". And that seems to suggest from the apostle that it wasn't in vain and it wouldn't be in vain—they were true believers. He wanted to warn them of the consequences of the error that they were falling into. But also, in doing that, he wanted to encourage them to repentance and turn them away from that error by showing his confidence in them.

Now Paul could have ended his argument right here—after all, their own experience demonstrated how salvation occurs. But he didn't do that. He makes an even stronger argument from Scripture.

Experience is very important. Experience confirms the truth. But Scripture is the truth—it is our authority. It is the source of doctrine. It is the ground of understanding. It is what gives us stability in life—and it settles the issue. And that's what Paul does in the next verses by turning to Abraham in the Book of Genesis, to prove that the Scriptures teach justification by faith alone, not by works.

His reference to Abraham has been called a master stroke, because the Judaizers looked to Moses for their authority. So Paul looked back, to a time before the Law, to prove his point.

Now of course, God commanded Abraham to be circumcised and to circumcise every male in his family. Circumcision was important. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham and His people. But that's recorded in Genesis 17. Paul referred back to Genesis 15, to a time before circumcision was instituted, to an incident in which there's no mention at all of circumcision or ceremonies—or any kind of work. The only thing Abraham did, in Genesis 15, was believe in God; and just as the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through faith, Abraham was justified by faith.

Paul begins verse 6, "Even so", meaning, 'Even as you were blessed by faith, so was Abraham'. He believed God, and it was "reckoned to him as righteousness", (Gen 15:16), or reckoned to him 'for' righteousness, or 'unto' righteousness. In other words, Abraham's faith was reckoned by God, or counted by Him as the means or instrument to obtaining righteousness.

We see this, for example, in Romans chapter 10, verse 10, where Paul writes, "...with the heart a person believes unto righteousness...", or "resulting" in righteousness. In Philippians, chapter 3, verse 9, Paul speaks of "the righteousness which comes from God which is through faith in Christ". Faith is the channel, the means, of coming and joining Christ and having the righteousness of Christ.

Well the two words that are important in Philippians 3:9 are the same words that are important here in Galatians 3:6, and Genesis 15:6: 'Faith' and 'righteousness', or 'believed' and 'righteous'. There is no mention of works, there's no mention of circumcision or any ceremonies. Abraham was justified and he was counted a righteous man as a believer—not as a worker.

Paul makes the same point in Romans 4 verse 6, where he states, "...God credits righteousness..." (or God imputes righteousness), "...apart from works..."; in other words, 'through faith to the believer'. And that's Paul's meaning here in Galatians chapter 3, verse 6, 'Abraham believed in God, and God reckons his faith for righteousness'—accepted it as the means of obtaining righteousness.

The righteousness obtained through faith is the righteousness of Christ. God clothes us in His righteousness, so to speak, and that's a good picture of it. It's as though we have white robes upon us, without any flaw, without any wrinkle, without any spot. We're pure white. That's what clothes us. Yes, we're sinners beneath it, but He sees us in that way, as clothed in righteousness. And on that basis He accepts us as righteous in His sight.

Again, nothing needs to be added to that. Abraham became right with God through faith alone. He was justified as an uncircumcised man. Now if Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, didn't need to be circumcised in order to be justified, then



Gentiles don't need to be. If Abraham was saved through faith then all men and women and people are saved through faith.

And so in verse 7, Paul concludes that believers, "...those who are of faith...are sons of Abraham." They are the true heirs of the promise given to Abraham—even if they are Gentiles. In fact, Gentile salvation was a promise that was given to Abraham at the very beginning in Genesis 12, verse 2. And Paul notes that. He quotes it here in verse 8 to prove his point, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." From the beginning, Gentiles have been in God's plan of salvation. And they would be saved the only way a person can be saved, the same way that Abraham was saved.

So Paul draws the conclusion in verse 9 that "...those who are of faith, (*believers*), are blessed with Abraham, the believer." They are justified with Him. You see the emphasis that he's putting upon faith, upon belief. They're declared righteous through faith alone. That is the teaching of Scripture, which gives the positive proof for Paul's Gospel being the true message of salvation.

But Paul is not finished. He now strengthens his position further in verses 10 through 14 by showing the impossibility of being saved by the Law. This is the negative side of his argument. Positively, Scripture teaches that we are saved through faith. Negatively, it teaches that the Law can't save—it brings a curse. Verse 10, "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all things written in the book of the law to perform them.' "

That's a quote from the Law itself, from Deuteronomy 27, verse 26, which states that the Law requires that a person live by all things written in it. If you're going to be saved by keeping the Law, you have to keep all of it. It requires perfect obedience for blessing. There's no room for failure. If a person fails in one point, he fails in it all, and he's condemned and cursed. No one can escape that.

James thought the same thing. In James chapter 2, verse 10, he wrote, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." Well that's quite a standard. You can try to keep all 613 of those commands—a rabbi counted

them up and that's what we tend to think is the number of all the commands—not just 10 but 613. Well, if you keep 612, but that one is a failure, the whole thing is a failure. That's what James tells us. The Law is like a pane of glass. Break one part of it and you've broken the whole thing. —The whole pane is broken.

So no one can be saved by law keeping, not because the Law is bad—it's not—but because man is incapable of keeping it. Man is incapable of obedience, the perfect obedience that the Law requires—that God requires if that's the path you're going to follow. That's what Paul says in verse 11. He says, it "is evident." It's evident from personal experience that we can't keep the Law. Everyone sins. Everyone knows that, if they're honest, but certainly what the Scripture teaches. But it's also evident from the Scriptures because they teach that a person is justified through faith. And the Scriptures teach that clearly.

Now that's not only taught in the Book of Genesis, it's not only taught in Genesis 15:6, but also in Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4, which Paul quotes here, again. This is one of his favorite verses, as well as Genesis 15:6. And Habakkuk wrote, "The righteous (*man*) shall live by his faith." It's by faith that a person stands in a right relationship with God. That's a different way, completely, from Law keeping.

Paul shows that again in verse 12, almost redundantly, but again quoting the Law, and this time Leviticus 18, verse 5, "He who practices them shall live by them." The condition that the Law lays down for obtaining eternal life is keeping its regulations—and keeping all of them. That is different from 'receive the gift of life by faith, and rest in the LORD.' The two principles are incompatible. As Paul says, "...the Law is not of faith." (vs12). Faith and works are different in nature, as different as 'receiving' and 'achieving' are. Like oil and water, they don't mix. And so we can't mix them and still have the Gospel.

The purpose of the Law is to create a desire for righteousness. It's faith that satisfies that desire. It's the means of obtaining righteousness. So, if a person chooses the principle of law-keeping, to achieve righteousness and gain life, he will only fail and be condemned. The Scriptures teach that. It's taught all through the Word of God. In the

Old Testament, throughout the Law. And the Scriptures are very clear as well that salvation is through faith in Christ, the Savior. Christ finished the work. Paul states that in verse 13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law..." That's how He saves the lost and condemned.

"Redeemed us" is a descriptive phrase. You've heard me and others use it, I think, many times. Redeemed means 'to buy', 'to purchase'. And the idea is He delivered us from the curse of the Law by paying the price and buying us out from under it. He paid the debt so that we could go free. And what did he pay, what was the price? Well, it was His own blood, what we will reflect on here in a few moments as we take the LORD'S Supper. He became accursed for us. He suffered the penalty of the broken Law in our place when He was crucified as our substitute in our place.

Paul finds proof of that again in the Law itself, in Deuteronomy 21, verse 23. "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." Now that passage is about hanging criminals on a stake or tree to publicly expose their shame. And that was the cross for Christ. Though He was innocent, though He was sinless, He died the death that we deserve. He died our death. He died the criminals' death—not for anything He had done, but for what we had done; for us, bearing the pain and shame in order to redeem us, Paul said. —To pay the price that we gain our freedom and new life. And the reason He did it is given in verse 14, so that in Christ, Gentiles might have "...the blessing of Abraham...." and "...we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

That really summarizes Paul's thought here. The blessing of Abraham, justification is through faith. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is received in the same way, and received at the same moment as faith. Through faith we're justified, and at that very moment we are sealed with the Spirit of God.

Paul states that in Ephesians, chapter 1, in verse 13, where he wrote, "...having also believed, you were sealed with Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." And the idea is, when you believed, (and when you believed), you were justified and you were sealed also with the Holy Spirit—all at the same moment—and permanently. It all happens at the moment of faith—we are both fully and forever accepted by God as His sons and

daughters. And we're not only accepted by Him, but we are equipped to live a life of obedience and growth through the Spirit of God.

So He not only accepts us as His children and accepts us as righteous and perfect in His sight, there's nothing we can do to add to that. But He adds to us the Spirit of God to enable us to walk victoriously and triumphantly—to understand things that were foolishness to us before, but now with enlightened minds, we understand the goodness and the grace of God. And Paul is addressing that new mind, that they have, to encourage them out of this error in which they've fallen.

Ceremonies and works of the Law can add nothing to that. The way we began the Christian life is the way we continue it; now and to the end. It is all of grace from beginning to end. We walk by faith—by faith, not by sight.

Paul demonstrated that first from the Galatians' experience. They received the Holy Spirit initially through faith, apart from works. Their experience of blessing proved salvation by grace. But secondly, he proved that from the Bible, extensively, Genesis 15:6, and Habakkuk 2, verse 4. Both teach that faith is essential for salvation. The Law teaches that attempting justification by works will fail—that justification by works brings not salvation but “a curse”. Christ has redeemed everyone who believes in Him from the curse of the Law, because He took the curse in our place by dying for us. That's where salvation is found, it's found in Christ. It's not found in the Law.

So when we speak of the necessity of faith and the importance of faith, and that God justifies those who believe, remember, it's faith in Christ. It's not simply ‘faith’. Everyone has faith in something. It's faith in something very specific, in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God become man who became our substitute, bore the penalty of sin in our place, paid the debt fully for us, so that there's nothing left for us to do, nothing left for us to pay. Think of the blasphemy of it to say, ‘You didn't do enough. More has to be done, and I'll do it by keeping the Law.’ No! Salvation is in Christ. It's not in the Law. And Paul said in verse 11, that “is evident.” Well it wasn't evident to the Galatians,

evidently. But they'd been bewitched by the mesmerizing idea of personal merit—of achieving acceptance with God by doing works of the Law.

Men are naturally drawn to that idea of merit. It appeals to their pride; it appeals to their sense of what God would require, what they would require, people doing something to earn what they have. So, they try to 'improve' the Gospel, they try to add something to it. Here it's circumcision. Other places it's baptism. All kinds of ceremonies, all kinds of added works.

This idea of merit...it's a deception. The Bible is clear. The just shall live by faith. Abraham was justified by faith. That is the only way to life, eternal life. That is the only way to freedom, freedom from the Law's curse—and assurance that we are completely accepted to God at the moment of faith.

What a freeing thing that is! When you understand the significance of justification, that through faith alone, in Christ alone, we are declared righteous forever with God. We don't need to gain His approval. We can live our life for Him out of a sense of gratitude and thankfulness for all that He's done for us. What a blessing that is. Salvation is free to the believer. We can't improve on God's work, and shouldn't try. It is complete, and we are entirely acceptable to Him at the moment of faith and we shouldn't be anxious about salvation. We shouldn't try to strive to impress God and gain His approval and worry that, 'Oh, we may not do enough and we may lose it' —or whatever. It's not about our performance.

We have everything we will ever need as a gift through faith. So may God help us to understand that and appreciate that—understand the greatness of grace and live rightly for Him, obediently for Him.

We must live obedient lives; that is true as well and just as important. But we're to do it out of gratitude to Him—for all that He's done for us.

But if you have not believed in Christ, you have reason to be anxious. You're not acceptable to God, not in that condition. You are under condemnation. The curse of the broken Law, and the penalty of the cross still hangs over you. But you need to know this,

Christ's sacrifice is good for everyone who believes in Him. So believe in Him. Trust in Christ. Enter into this great blessing of eternal life. May God help you to do that. And may He help us to appreciate all that our LORD has done for us.

So before we give thanks for the bread, let's remember that and give thanks to the LORD for all that He's done for us. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for this great truth that Paul, the great apostle defended and explained with such emotion. You love these Galatians. You love them greatly—and that becomes all the more clear as this book unfolds. And so he has a kind of righteous anger about the error that they've fallen into—how foolish it was of them and he wanted so desperately to bring them out of that. And I trust that that was successful because they, I believe, were believers—and while we fall into error, it's through such encouragement like this that the apostle gave such exhortation and admonition that we are brought back to the truth when we fail or drift.

So Father, I thank You for the message that's given here. It's a reminder to us of the danger that we all face, that we can drift off into various kinds of error. We need to look to You constantly, and trust You, and know that Your grace is sufficient for everything—fundamentally sufficient for our salvation. It's all of You; Salvation is of the LORD. That's certainly the theme that Paul is preaching here and throughout this great Book of Galatians.

Father, we thank You for the gift of life in Your Son. And Father, prepare our hearts now as we take the LORD's Supper. We pray that You would bless this time: Edify us; build us up in the faith; help us to focus on Your grace and Your mercy that was poured out on us through the shed blood of Your Son, the LORD Jesus Christ. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

*(End of Audio)*