



Sermon Growth Guide

September 18, 2022

Free from the Curse



Sermon Growth Guide

September 18, 2022

Freedom - Free from the Curse

Galatians 3:1-22

Key Verse: Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”

Big Idea: Faith in Christ brings freedom to our whole life, not legalism.

Foundations

This passage is about law vs. faith. How can we best understand what Paul is trying to convey to us, the people of God?

The law in many ways is seen as a list of right and wrong actions, but the law is actually a guardrail to protect us and to show our sin. God knew all along the law cannot save. Therefore, faith in Christ isn't included in the law.

Faith is about believing even if you have not seen. It's about trusting with no guarantee. In addition, faith is not obtained through doing good works. Faith is received by believing. Paul uses Abraham as an example. God's promise was given to Abraham because of his faith (which God also gave to Abraham) and not because of his works.

Faith brings freedom. That means even in the mistakes we make, the grace given to us by faith has freed us from condemnation, sin, brokenness, self-deprecation, and more. Paul distinguishes the law vs. faith like this: the law condemns us because of our sin, but faith frees us despite our sin. Through faith in Christ, freedom is possible from any sin.

That means Jesus is not asking you to do a list of works, or to work on your mistakes, or to be a good Christian. Jesus is asking you to give your life to Him and to walk in His righteousness.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Galatians 3:1-22.

What is the point Paul is trying to drive to by comparing law vs. faith? Why did Paul have to make this distinction so evident to the Galatians?

How is faith in Christ freeing? Can you name the promise that God gave Abraham? What does that mean to us? How is this passage good news to Galatia? How is it good news to us?

Applying God's Word

Faith is not blinding. Faith is believing with all your knowledge, understanding and body.

What are some areas in your life that you are still living by the law and not through faith in Christ? What are some ways that you can remember the promise of Christ daily?

Witnessing God's Word

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.”

It is freeing that our works do not count for our righteousness. It is through faith alone we join in Christ. In what ways is this passage uplifting to you?

When you read every verse of a book of the Bible in a sermon series you get long passages. I knew going into it that there would come a Sunday like this when reading the passage takes longer than preaching the sermon! Don't worry, I'll preach longer. No. I need to give you the overview, summarize Paul's argument here, and then we can drill into the key point, the crux, which is this: We are all under the guilt of the curse. "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Galatians 3:10). Under the curse, we try three things. We try to wriggle out from under it, work our way through it, or give up and accept it. Under the curse. But Jesus took that curse upon Himself. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole'" (Galatians 3:13). The very verse that made it hard for people to believe Jesus was the Messiah is the verse to prove that He was. Jesus became cursed so that we could be made free.

"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1). Paul sees a church, a free, Christian, gospel-movement church trying to walk back into works righteousness. O foolish Galatians! "Foolish" here is not the word for goofy or silly or unintelligent. The word means "unthinking." Irrational. Not thinking it through to its full implications. See, ours is a thinking faith. Paul says, "This isn't like you, guys. Are you under a spell? What's going on? You saw the fullness of the gospel truth in Jesus Christ who was crucified and gave Himself for you to win your salvation, but now you are trying to earn your salvation as

though Christ never died for you, as though Jesus never won it for you, as though you can earn it on your own through works. You are not thinking it through." So, Paul makes the famous argument. Did you get the Holy Spirit by earning it? No. It was a gift. Did you see the power of God in your life because you earned it? No. It was a gift. The Spirit started you going, do you think He has left you to finish the race under your own steam? No. No, no, no. You are not thinking it through.

Paul's opponents said something like, "If you want to follow Jesus you need to become like us, children of Abraham. Children of Abraham, males are circumcised and all are marked as different and keep themselves obedient to the patterns of life that define the offspring of Abraham." Paul argued, "You know what? Not even Abraham kept the ways of the children of Abraham. He didn't have them to keep! Moses and the written law came long after Abraham, 430 years later." How then was Abraham saved and included in the promise of God, the promise that ultimately was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus? By faith. "So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ...So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3:6-7,9). Faith. So let's go with that. Abraham believed; he put his faith in God's promise. That promise turned out to be Jesus. Believe what Jesus has done for you. Receive the freedom He has won by grace.

But if you want to try to go back to earning it under the law, you will fall back under the curse. "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written



in the Book of the Law” (Galatians 3:10). You have to keep it all, or you are under the curse. Once you know the law, you have to keep the law, all of it. To fail in any part is to fall short of righteousness, and the curse sets in. What is the curse? The curse is separation from God. It is a break in relationship. God and our disobedience don't mix. Broken off from God, we become anxious, resentful, angry. We have animosity toward God, and we have animosity with one another, and even animosity within ourselves. It's all wrong. It's all broken. It all hurts. The misery of the miserable. Where is God in all that? God is there. God is love. God is willing and eager to save, to restore the relationship, but as long as we stand in disobedience, we cannot be with God.

So why did God give the law? Why reveal the law at all if this is what happens? It was all part of the promise. As we said last week, the law isn't evil. It reveals the truth of things; the heart of God; the way things truly are in the world God made. It makes our situation clear, the human condition. But the promise came even before the law, the promise that God loves us and blesses us and has plans to redeem us. The promises God shared with Abraham pointed to a seed. That seed is Jesus. “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). This is the argument. Salvation is not the product of God revealing a law of behaviors; salvation is the produce of the promises of God made good in His Son Jesus Christ. Until we believe in Him, we are under the curse.

Under the guilt of the curse, you will try three things. You will try to wriggle out from under it, work your way through it, or you will give

up and accept it. None of these is freedom. Jesus has won a better freedom. Jesus. To know Him is to love Him. To trust Him is to have confidence. To bend the knee and serve Him is to finally be free.

Under the weight of the guilt of the curse, we try **(1) to wriggle our way out of it.** What do I mean? We remove every mention of God or religion from the public square. That makes me feel guilty. Get rid of it all, and then we will be free. This is the modern project of Lenin and Marx, of Chairman Mao, of Europe and increasingly of our own country. Don't talk about God. It makes me feel guilty. The problem is we still feel guilty even after we stop talking about God. Social scientists find that we still feel a pervasive sense of guilt. Even if we remove God's standard, we still have our own standards we fail to attain and the weight of guilt remains. Sigmund Freud called it “das Unbehagen,” a pervasive and persistent feeling of disquiet, uneasiness, and discomfort stemming from guilt. Having removed God and sin from the public square, we also removed any vehicle for redemption or forgiveness. So, we just walk around under the weight of it. And without redemption or forgiveness, the weight of our guilt finds its expression in righteous indignation and judgmentalism against those around us. In other words, I cancel you because it makes my guilt feel better. I think that's true. That's not my insight; it comes from an article I was shown from *The Hedgehog Review* (Wilfred McClay; Spring 2017). I think that's what we are experiencing. That isn't freedom. You can't wriggle out of it.

(2) We work our way through it.

This is the primary problem Paul addresses. Works righteousness. I can earn my way out of this weight of the curse. Show me what to do, and I'll do it. I'll try harder, push stronger,



put in more effort, work my fingers to the bone. If I can't justify myself religiously, then I'll pivot to work vocationally. Success, riches, power, reputation, etc. The great ladder of success. Thomas Merton said, "People spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall." Or, **(3) We give up and accept it.** The curse will always be there. The weight of guilt will never go away. But I can find ways to numb the pain. I can distract myself from it. I can scroll by it. I can manage it or escape from it. I can keep myself distracted and unfeeling and just, plain, numb. That's not freedom. There is one more way. Jesus has taken the curse so that you can live in the blessing.

Tim Keller is a retired Presbyterian pastor who planted a church in New York City against all odds. He retired a few years ago and was immediately diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which threatens to take his life. He said recently that the cancer has taught him something. He said that he and his wife Kathy realized, although they believed and taught grace, they had been living unwittingly under a regime of works righteousness. The cancer revealed a deep-seated belief that God blesses or curses according to our works, that if you live a good life and do nothing wrong then nothing wrong or bad will happen to you. Why did I get cancer, God? All I do is good. We preach grace but still live under works, he said. No. Bad things happen to good people. Children of God suffer evil and pain and tribulation. Cancer happens to Christians as much as non-Christians, to good Christians as well as bad Christians, to performers as well as non-performers. Get it? He was living under works righteousness. In a way, he says, the cancer gave him greater insight into the grace of Jesus. It made him more free.

So, hear me now, even in trial and suffering, you are free. What is it to you? You are not under the curse. You are under the blessing. If you truly believe in what Christ has won—Jesus has won a better freedom—if you truly believe in what Jesus has won, you are under the blessing, not the curse. Your job has shifted, your career isn't going to be as fulfilling as you hoped. So what? You are not under the curse; you are under the blessing. You have eternity before you. You lose a fortune in the market. So what? You stand to inherit the fullness of the riches of the Kingdom of God. You are not under the curse; you are under the blessing. Your marriage doesn't seem to scratch every itch; your kids don't line up like the Von Trapp family to sing you lullabies at the end of the night. Do you think you are cursed? You are not under the curse; you are under the blessing. You have eternity before you. Cancer threatens to shorten your life on earth. Listen, I'm serious now. I do not discount the pain and the reality of the struggle you are in. It hurts. But when you are tempted to say, "Why me, O Lord?" and you lie in bed thinking the Lord has laid a heavy hand of curse on you, remember, you are not under the curse. Cancer can't touch you. Death can't touch you. You are in Christ. You are under the blessing. You have forgiveness, peace and eternal life in the blessing won by Jesus. You have eternity to spend. You are immortal!

You are not under the curse; you are under the blessing. Jesus Christ became the curse for you, so that you can live in the blessing. That is freedom. That is when you are free. Do you see? When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

