

Galatians 3:14-16

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. 15 Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, "And to offsprings," as of many; but it says, "And to your offspring," that is, to one person, who is Christ (NRSV).

In the middle of the 1st century, the Christian movement was connected to Judaism with increasing numbers of Gentiles. The Apostle Paul identified himself as the apostle to Gentiles. His work and his sense of purpose was very important in the development of the church and its relationship between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. One very important issue was the Law of Moses which questioned if Gentile Christians need to convert to Judaism in order to become Christian. The letter to the Galatians reveals Paul's view of this controversy. His position is crucial to the survival of the Christian church. Paul's perspective is that the law is not compatible with the gospel because God's plan for human salvation is dependent upon grace not observance of the Law of Moses.

Today's Scripture is not easy to understand so I will attempt to explain it. The blessing comes to us from Jesus Christ who redeemed us from the curse of the law. The flaw of the law is that the law is based on a negative stimulus. With the law, motivation for obedience is based on the fear of punishment. Obedience to God and the law is observed by the people in order to keep from being punished. However, grace has a much stronger impact. Grace has a magnetic appeal in that it you are automatically pulled in the right direction because it is based on love. An example that I often use is the relationship between children and parents. The children that respect and appreciate their parents are obedient out of love and respect. They are motivated by love. God, out of love, changed everything when God exchanged law for grace. This is the law of love. God's love, grace, and a law that is based on love is a blessing that we have received.

The conflict that the Apostle Paul faced is that Jewish identity was based on law. They were not about to sacrifice their heritage and identity. So, they insisted on observance of the Law of Moses. However, Christ freed us from the law. It was not so that we would be disobedient; we are actually more obedient due to the motivations that stem out of love and appreciation. Through Christ Jesus we have a new covenant. Everyone can now get the blessing of Abraham, as the blessing from God comes to the Gentiles. The old covenant law was repeatedly broken by the nation of Israel. The new covenant was given to us by Jesus Christ himself. As prophesied by Jeremiah this new covenant will not be broken. The contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant is explained further in Hebrews.

Recently I read a story that I thought was interesting. What was interesting to me was not so much the story itself but the lesson that it taught. It was about high school student that was a good athlete. He was even voted the most valuable player. However, one evening he just could not get his mind into the game because his girlfriend had recently broken up with him and during the game she sat on the front row with her new boyfriend. Needless to say his performance was terrible. The key points that the author of the story made is that the devil uses our weaknesses to undermine us and every Christian must admit some kind of defeat. Failure comes when your

concern is the opinions of others and the standards that you set for yourself are more important to you than the standards that Jesus has for you. When your concern is what others will think of you then you are a slave to the expectations of others. The advice given is to live by God's expectations, not yours, or the expectations of others. Getting rid of unreasonable demands takes off a lot of pressure. So, admit that you took your eyes off of Jesus. That last sentence stuck with me. *Admit that you took your eyes off of Jesus.* That's what I have been saying all along; focus your life on Jesus.

We have received God's blessing. God redeems us and saves us. We deserve punishment for disobedience but what we get is love and grace. To free us from something that we rightly deserve is a really great thing. It is a blessing. Christ set us free. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. We don't earn God's love by following rules. We do not receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law. The generosity of God is extended to the undeserved. We deserve to be punished for transgression. What God deserves is our love, respect, honor, appreciation, and devotion.

Christians live by faith. We are called to express our love and appreciation for God's blessing that is freely given to us. Do not take the gift for granted. The promise is given directly by God, made to Abraham, and fulfilled in Christ. Abraham acted on faith. We too are to act on faith. Respond to the blessing by showing God our love and give back to God according to how we have been blessed.