

**Many of our junior and senior high school students** are away today on their winter retreat, the focus of which is training in this month’s LP (Loving People) project – the distribution of Life Books in the public schools. In 1961, the United States Supreme Court outlawed the reading of the Bible and the offering of prayer in public schools. The secularists thought they had won, but I believe in outfoxing them, overruling them, and keeping prayer and the Bible in school after all. In the elementary grades we can do it with our Good News Clubs, which are after-school Bible clubs that meet under the full protection of the United States Constitution. And with our junior and senior high school students, we can do it by training them to demand and to exercise their constitutional rights as Christian students to distribute Bibles to fellow students, employs, teachers, and staff.

Founded by the Gideons International, Lifebook is a thin copy of the Gospel of John designed for students to give out at school. This weekend our teens are receiving training on just how to do it, and we intend to distribute 1200 of the between February 6 and 10. They cost about a dollar each, so we have to raise the money. But what an investment!

You never know how the Lord will use a proffered Bible or New Testament or Gospel of John. In a recent copy of the *Gideon Magazine*, a single mother in Billings, Montana, told her story. She said her life was in a nosedive, and all she could think about was failure and despair. One day she went into the closet with a pistol, ready to end her own life. Just at that moment—literally seconds away, she said—her son burst through the front door of the house, shouting, “Mamma, mamma, come look what I have.” She quickly put the pistol away, composed herself, and walked out to meet her son who was waving a New Testament he had received from the Gideons. That little book, which arrived in the nick of time, changed her life and her family and her future. It introduced her to the hope of the Gospel and gave her a reason to live.<sup>1</sup>

That’s our current field of study on Sunday mornings as we’re looking into the letter written by the apostle Paul to the Galatians. Having just returned from his missionary efforts in the land of Turkey, which are described for us in Acts 13 and 14, Paul learned that some Judaizers were following in his footsteps and corrupting his churches. They were teaching that Christianity wasn’t for Gentiles, but only for Jews and for those Gentiles willing to become Jews. They were teaching that the Gospel is not a matter of being justified by grace through faith. It’s a matter of grace plus works—like the keeping of the law, the keeping of the rituals and regulations of Judaism. Paul wrote them a letter, and he wrote in a fury. His letter is a tempest. In chapters 1 and 2, he gave the Galatians an account of the origination of the Gospel. He said that it didn’t come

from men or from a man. It came from God. He reviewed his own history and said he wasn’t sent from men or from a man, but from God. He declared, in effect, “Even though I am not one of the twelve apostles, I have the same message they do. And I was called and trained by the same Jesus as they were, only along a parallel track.”

And now in chapters 3 and 4, Paul continued on to give us an explanation of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Today let’s look at the first half of the chapter—Galatians 3:1-16. Let’s divide this paragraph into three different emphases.

#### **The Gospel is Not Negotiable (v. 1-5)**

The opening makes that point that the Gospel is not negotiable. All the way through this book, Paul is emphatic. He is assertive and almost aggressive. Look at the way he begins chapter 3:

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.*

There are three very interesting words here in verse 1. The first is “foolish.” He referred to his readers as “foolish,” a word that means senseless. This word can be cruel, of course, as anyone knows who has been called stupid. But it can also be affectionate, as when the Lord Jesus said to the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have said.” The apostle Paul was speaking affectionately to us, but he was still driving home his point.

The second word is “bewitched.” Our English word obviously conveys the idea of a witch casting a spell. The Greek word that Paul used, *baskaino*, occurs only this one time in the New Testament. It means someone who looks at you with mesmerizing eyes, and their eyes confuse or mislead you. You’ve heard of the evil eye. This refers to the superstition that someone can hypnotize you with the power of his stare. In fact, one commentary translated this: “Who has hypnotized you?”<sup>2</sup> These false teachers were charismatic, appealing, magnetic, gifted, intelligent, and seemed to be authoritative.

The third word is “portrayed.” He goes on to say: *Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.*

The word “portrayed” is another interesting Greek word – *prographo*. It means to publicly and vividly describe something. It’s the idea of putting something on a placard or a billboard. Paul seems to be saying, “I painted you a picture of the crucifixion of Christ. I described the pounding of the nails, the throbbing of His pulse, the distortion of His body, the labor of His breathing, the streaking of His blood. I explained to you that by His death on the cross, Jesus did everything that was needed to save you. The finished work of Christ on the cross

has forgiven your sins, reconciled you to God, saved you from hell, ensured for you eternal life. Who has bewitched you that you have turned away from that?

We can ask the same question today. Jesus Christ—Son of God and Son of Man—come to this earth, suffered and bled and died for you. See the pounding of the nails, the throbbing of the pain, the distortion of the body, the labor of the breathing, the streaking of the blood.

Who has bewitched you that you have backslidden away from Him? Who has bewitched you that you are committing immorality? Who has bewitched you that you are sleeping around? That you are addicted to pornography? That you are greedy? That you are bitter toward your husband or wife? That you are getting drunk? That you are treating another person with contempt? That you are holding a grudge? That you are rebelling against your parents and breaking their hearts? That you are neglecting your daily devotions and your church and your Christian service? This kind of persuasion does not come from God.

Verse 2 continues:

*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*

Was your life changed because you adopted the Jewish law? No. It was Jesus Christ that changed your life. It was the Holy Spirit.

*Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*

You can’t have it both ways. Salvation is either by grace or by works. And it is not by works; it is by grace alone. The Bible says, “For by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, not of works lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is not negotiable.

#### **The Gospel is Not New (v. 6-9)**

But now, beginning in verse 6, Paul makes another point, one that he will later explain more fully in Romans 4. The Gospel, he said, is not new. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith goes all the way back to the first book of the Bible, to the book of Genesis, to chapter 12 of Genesis, to Abraham.

Verse 6 says: *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

This is a quotation from Genesis 15, and it is very important. Abraham was considered the father of Judaism. He was the founder of Israel. So was Abraham saved by keeping the Law? No, the law had not even been given. But God made him a promise, and Abraham believed that promise and it was credited to him as righteousness. In other words, he was declared righteous in God’s sight on the basis of His faith.

*Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.*

And now we have one of the most thrilling sentences in the entire New Testament. Galatians 3:8 continues:

*The Scripture... That means the Old Testament Scripture. (The Old Testament) foresaw – anticipated. It predicted. It previewed. It foretold – that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.*

This is not a New Testament doctrine. It is a Bible doctrine and it’s an expression of the way God has always worked. And...

*(The Old Testament) announced the Gospel in advance...*

One of the reasons I can believe the Bible with intellectual credibility is because of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. It’s one of the most thrilling subjects you could ever study. Every element and aspect of Jesus Christ and His Gospel is predicted in advance.

*(The Old Testament) announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham.*

When did that happen? It happened when the Lord told Him: *“All nations will be blessed through you.”*

Here is what the Lord was saying to Abraham in the book of Genesis: “Abraham, I want to bring Good News to every human being on this planet. I want every person in every nation of every ethnicity and ancestry to know of My love. And so you will have a son, you will have a family, you will produce a nation, and out of that nation will come a Savior for the world. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you.”

The Gospel was global from the very beginning. Abraham and the Jews were set aside to be the channel through whom the Messiah would come into the world. They were to protect themselves with laws and ceremonial regulations to safeguard the transmission of the Messianic line—the Seed—but it was the Gospel that would be applicable to all the world, not those ceremonial regulations.

Verse 9 says: *So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

So the apostle Paul is telling the Galatians that even Abraham and the heroes of the Old Testament were not saved by keeping the Law. They weren't saved by circumcision. They weren't saved by diet. They weren't saved by the butchering of bulls and goats. They were saved by trusting in the grace of God. They were saved on the basis of what Jesus would do on the cross just as we are saved by what He did for us on the cross.

When you get to heaven, you can go up to Abraham and say, "Abraham, how did you get here? How did you get to heaven?"

He will say, "Through the blood of Jesus Christ. I did not understand all about it. I did not have all the information. The Law had not yet been given. But I had a simple promise—that through my descendants and me, all the world would be blessed. And I claimed that promise by faith and it was a promise about Jesus Christ. And I was saved by grace through faith."

Go up to heaven and say to Moses, "How did you come to be here? Did you reach heaven by keeping the law? Were you a perfect man?" He will say, "No, I had a short temper. I murdered a man. I faltered and failed many times. But God told me about the Passover Lamb, which was previewed on the night I led the Israelites out of Egypt. The Lord told me that He would raise up a prophet like me from among His brethren." And I trusted in that Lamb, in that Prophet, who was to come. And God credited my faith as righteousness."

Go up to heaven and ask King David, "How did you come to be here? Did you reach heaven by the keeping of the Law?" He will say, "No, I was an immoral man, and a man of war, and a man with many flaws and failures. But in the Psalms the Lord spoke of the Stone that the builders rejected but which became the cornerstone of the temple, and it was marvelous in our eyes and I believed, and God credited my faith as righteousness."

Go up to heaven and ask the prophet Micah, "How did you come to be here? Did you enter heaven by the Law?" He will say, "No, that could not be. But I was told of one to be born in the little town of Bethlehem, whose comings and goings were of old, even from eternity. And I believed that promise, and God credited it to me as righteousness."

Go up to heaven and ask Isaiah the prophet, "How did you come to be here? By the Law?" And he will say, "Never by the law. Never by works. All we like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

One and all without exception and without deviation, the heroes of the Old Testament will say: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm

found, was blind but now I see." The doctrine of justification by grace is not a new doctrine. It wasn't invented by the apostles. It wasn't developed by Paul. It's the only way since the days of Adam and Eve that anyone has ever been declared righteous enough to know God and to enter His heaven.

#### **The Gospel is Not Legalistic (v. 10-14)**

The Gospel is not negotiable. The Gospel is not new. And the Gospel is not legalistic. Let's continue reading with verse 10:

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

Many years ago in London, my wife and I went to see the great production of "Phantom of the Opera." Many of you have seen it on Broadway or in the movies. The most dramatic scene in "Phantom of the Opera" is when the great chandelier comes crashing into the audience. The setting is the Paris Opera House. And the scene was based on an actual event in 1896, when a counterweight to a chandelier fell, killing a construction worker. That event inspired the writing of the story. I've sometimes been in concert halls or auditoriums or churches with massive chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and I never like to sit beneath them. One broken link in the chain and the whole thing comes crashing down.

And that's the way the Law is. If we had to get to heaven by keeping the Law, we would have to live a perfect life. If you break one law—if you ever curse or covet or have an immoral thought or fail to reverence God—you have lost the perfection that qualifies you to be in God's presence. You don't have to break the whole law. For a chandelier to fall doesn't require every link in the chain to break. Just one will do it.

And Paul said, "Cursed is everyone who does not do and continue to do everything that is written in the book of the Law." Therefore...

*Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because "The righteous will live by faith."*

Not by legalism but by grace.

*The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

#### **Conclusion**

This is a tremendously liberating message. It means that you can never do anything to make God love you more than He loves you right now. You can never do anything to make God love you less than He loves you right now.

If you think you have to live a certain way, keep a certain list of rules, live a perfect life to win the love of God, you're wrong. If you think you've made such a mess of your life that God cannot possibly love you, you're wrong.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more or less than He does right now. It is in His nature to love, and He loves you just because He loves you.

But we have to receive His love, to respond to it, and to learn to love Him in return. When we do our lives will be different, our behaviors will change, our attitudes will improve. But grace is the unmerited favor of God.

*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

You don't have to live trying to win the love of God, and you don't have to live in fear that God no longer loves you because of what you've done. Don't let anyone bewitch you with any other message than: Grace plus nothing equals everything.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup>"Literally Seconds Away" in *The Gideon*, January 2012, 3.

<sup>2</sup>*The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians*.

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Donelson Free Will Baptist Church  
3210 McGavock Pike  
Nashville, TN 37214  
Across from McGavock High School

(615) 871-GROW  
www.donelson.org

Grace Series

# The Gospel in Advance

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from  
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loving God. loving people.