

## The Epistle to the Galatians: The Gospel of Grace

### Lesson 8: A Defense of Justification by Faith Alone from Scripture (3:6-14)

In Acts chapter 16, we see Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God while in prison. The prisoners were all blessed to hear the gospel truths both in the lyrics of their hymns, as well as the articulation and emotion of their prayers. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. Every door of the prison was opened, and all the bonds that were fastened to the prisoners was unlocked. They were free to run! When the jailer woke up (sleeping on the job eh?) he figured he had just messed up in the most catastrophic way, and figured it would be better to commit suicide than face the consequences of allowing such an escape. Paul, standing off in the distance and perceiving that the jailer was about to kill himself, yelled over to him, **“Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”** We are all here? Let me get this straight, a prison stocked full of law-breaking scoundrels opens up while the guards are unconscious, and nobody bolts??? The scripture never tells us why they stayed. Maybe they were afraid of the earthquake and preparing for certain aftershocks. Maybe they figured they’d just get caught and be in a worse position than they presently were. But maybe they knew that there was a supernatural correlation between the gospel message of Paul and Silas and this earthquake, and out of respect for them they stayed. This last option seems to be the reason for response of the jailer. He called for some men to rush into the room where the prisoner were with torches, and entering in he fell to his knees before Paul and Silas. Clearly, he had been enlightened by God to hear this gospel and recognize its truth. He must have recognized not just the earthquake, but the clearly miraculous affect that it had on the doors and bonds as nothing short of the work of God. So he rushed in, fell to his knees, and asked them, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** Paul and Silas, knowing just what to say, replied, *“Well, first you’re going to have to become a Jew, then, we’ve got a list a mile long of laws that you’re going to have to keep. There’s certain foods that you’re going to have to abstain from. There’s certain days that you’ll have to keep holy. There’s a huge amount of sacrifices for your sins that you’ll have to maintain. We’ve got to get you circumcised first, of course...”* That’s not what they said at all. Quite the opposite of preaching the law the this man, they told him of the free grace found in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. They answered with the famous verse we now know as Acts 16:31, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”**

How was justification appropriated to the jailer? By his belief (faith) in Jesus Christ! He was saved, not because of his intellect, not because he kept any ceremonies, or rituals, or observances, not because of any morality, but because he believed that Jesus Christ was God’s Son who died in his place! This was the way that the jailer was saved, as well as Paul, Silas, Timothy, Barnabas, and every other Christian too! Justification by faith alone is the consistent teaching from the whole scripture! Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly teaches, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** Now perhaps one of you is questioning my claim that justification by faith alone is the consistent teaching from the whole of scripture, thinking that this doctrine seems to be clear in the New Testament, but not present in the Old. Wasn’t the teaching of the Judaizers leading the people to follow the Old Testament alone which added damning works to salvation? This is the purpose of Paul’s point in this lesson. In our last lesson, he appealed to Galatians knowledge of justification by faith alone through their own personal experience with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Now, Paul will build the case that justification by faith alone is scriptural, and he will use the Old Testament to do so.

## A walk down the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith" before we continue in our text

We see from the book of Hebrews the examples of Abel, Noah and Moses in Hebrews 11. You should recall the account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, when Cain brought forth an offering from the fruit of the ground, while Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. God was pleased with Abel's offering, but He had no regard to Cain's. This burned Cain and led him to commit the first murder in history with Abel. Why was God pleased the Abel and not Cain? I believe the answer to lie in the manner of worship that each man chose to practice.

There is always a prescribed manner of worship. There are certain things that we will do this morning, and there are certain things they we won't do this morning, and never will. Why? Because our worship is based upon the revelation from God in scripture as to what is proper and what isn't. God has a prescribed way to worship Him, and He always has. From the beginning, God has required sacrifice to atone for sin. We see the first substitutionary sacrifice happen in the garden. As soon as Adam and Eve fell, they immediately recognized their sin, and knew their nakedness. The sewed fig leaves together in an attempt to cover their nakedness. (Gen. 3:7) This was not sufficient, and after God placed His curses on them both, He covered them appropriately with garments of skin. (3:21) Right from the first sin, Adam and Eve both knew that an animal gave its life to cover their sin, so that their own life might continue. Blood was the proper sacrifice for sin. All of it pointed forward to the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Assuredly, Adam and Eve raised their children to know the prescribed method of offering a sacrifice to God, in order to please Him.

In the case of Cain and Abel, they both would have known well the prescribed way of giving the appropriate sacrifice, but only one followed it. It wasn't that Cain didn't care, he certainly believed in God, and desired to be in His good graces, the problem is that Cain wanted to worship God in his own way. Cain worshipped God on his own terms, according to his own plan and will. Abel on the other hand, knowing what God wanted, and believing God's prescribed way, acted accordingly.

I want you to notice the parallel between Cain and the Judaziers, and Abel and the Galatians. Cain sought to justify himself using methods that were not prescribed, whereas Abel simply believed God, and his belief counted towards him as righteousness. Let's read the text from Hebrews 11:4, **"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."**

We see also from Hebrews 11, that Noah was justified before the Lord because of his faith. Here we have a man who (because of his time in history) had no scripture to read, and therefore had little to build a theology upon. His knowledge of God would have been very limited. We're also talking about a man who had never seen rain in his life. And yet this man will forever be known as one who acted in conformity to the will of God, because he believed God (had faith). Hebrews 11:7, **"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."**

We also see from Hebrews 11 the life of Moses. There is much to say concerning his life, more than would be necessary for this lesson. Given his time in history, Moses had a lot more to work with as far as his knowledge of God than Noah did. In short, we know how his life could have gone. Being found by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in Pharaoh's house, he became a prince of Egypt and served as such for

fourty years! He experienced wealth, power, the best education, in short, the best that society had to offer. Of course he knew that he was adopted. He knew that he was an Israelite, being raised under the influence of his own mother. At the age of fourty Moses was forced to face a major decision: pledge allegiance to the Egyptians, or forsake them (giving up everything) and join his people. Hebrews 11:24-28 records, **“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured him as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.”** Moses was likewise justified by his faith alone. He believed God and did chose the path that seemed the most dangerous, the most difficult, the least likely to be successful. Moses did so because he believed in the God that he served.

Every one of us battle the same sinful heart, and serve the same holy God, in the same fallen world as they did. Every one of us hold the same revelation from God, which commands the same response from us. Will we believe God’s will for our life and belief and conduct and conform? Or will we choose our own manner of worship like Cain? There is only one faith that justifies, and that is faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith in Christ is tangible faith in Christ as He is revealed in the scriptures.

#### Paul’s Plan to Point out the Judaizers Error

Our path down Hebrews 11 was a bonus trail just for your pleasure. Paul didn’t bring up those names to solidify his point, but he did point to the Old Testament to show justification by faith alone. He did so because the Judaizers were doubtlessly bringing up the Mosaic law to defend their claims of strict adherence to the law for justification. Their theological positions were the result of long-accepted and revered rabbinical tradition, and because of their persuasive arguments from Jewish tradition, they carried the Galatians off into much error.

Paul’s plan is to show justification by faith alone using the example of their father Abraham. His plan was to expose their heretical view, to show their terrible misinterpretation of scripture. Paul does so in two ways in our text: first, by showing what true saving faith is, and second, by showing once again how works cannot save anyone.

#### What Saving Faith Looks Like

Galatians 3:6-9, **“Just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness? Know then that it is those of faith are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”**

Paul goes right the heart, right to the source of the matter. The Jews pointed back to father Abraham, their holy patriarch. Therefore, Paul exposes their error by showing how he is the pattern of saving faith, not the father of justification by works. The Judaizers argument for their case using Abraham as their example went like this: They quoted Genesis 12:2-3 (which Paul partly quotes in our text), **“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** So the argument begins that everyone who will ever be blessed by God, has to be considered by God to be a descendant of Abraham. From that promise of blessing

from God, they move a few chapters in Genesis later to the covenant that God made with Abraham, Genesis 17:10, **“This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”** What was the picture of circumcision? It showed the need of cutting away inherited sin, which was passed down generation to generation.

Adding Genesis 12 and 17 together, the Judaizers were teaching that if anyone who wanted to be right with God had to be a child of Abraham, than they needed to be circumcised first. They taught that there was no blessing from God, no covenant, no promise to anyone who was not circumcised. Paul, in response to their poor theology, shows how God preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying that those who respond to God like him (in faith alone) will be blessed along with him. In verse 9 of our text he alludes to a convenient verse in Genesis 15 that the Judaizers must have forgotten about. The game changer called Genesis 15:6, **“And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”** How was Abraham considered righteous? By his belief in what the Lord had said to him. When was Abraham considered righteous? Two chapters before the covenant of circumcision even happened, two chapters that in the timeline amounted to possibly fourteen years later in his life. This is the exact line of argumentation that Paul used when he wrote to the Romans in 4:7-12.

The Judaizers had inverted the relationship between being circumcised and being saved. Circumcision never saved, just as in our day, infant baptism doesn't save (which the Roman Catholic church teaches). The RCC teaches that baptism removes original sin. Not that they teach that baptism finally saves someone, but they teach that salvation is impossible without it. Circumcision was a sign, much like (although not a perfect parallel) baptism is a sign for us today. Circumcision identified the Jews as different. Living in a sin-cursed, God-hating world, it marked them as a sinful people who required the cleansing of sin from God. But it was always just a sign, there was no physical cleansing that happened by mutilating a portion of a man's skin from his reproductive organ. The act of circumcision was a visible manifestation of a something that was spiritually true in their heart (or at least it ought to have been).

In a similar way, we follow Christ through the waters of baptism. There isn't a super-power in the water that we're immersed in. There's no saving agent in the water. In fact, nowhere in scripture is it taught that someone who came to know Christ as Saviour and quickly died without baptism would perish for lack of it. Baptism is a sign, an outward manifestation of a spiritual reality in our soul that we have placed our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Baptism is the sign that we will follow Christ with the rest of our life. What is true for us in baptism was true of Abraham in circumcision, we were both declared righteous by our faith in God's revelation *before* those occasions. And what is true of us in baptism was true of them in circumcision, there were those who went through the physical act, while the spiritual act had never happened. God is most interested in the spiritual reality, never the hypocritical physical act. Paul, making this very point to the Romans, wrote in 2:28-29, **“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”** In other words, your circumcision is worthless if God has not moved to save you in the first place.

It's human, more accurately, sinful nature to pride ourselves in our own accomplishments for salvation. It's our sinful nature to see ourselves as basically good people who are in God's good graces, who please Him with our obedience and morality. I challenge you to go to work, or school tomorrow and ask the first ten people you see if they're a good person, you'll be hard-pressed to find someone who admits they're a bad one. The Jews were not exempted from this delusion. They were a very proud people, a

people who walked the earth with a sort of invincibility because of their connection with father Abraham. So sure were they that they shared in the blessings of Abraham that they boasted of their inherited righteousness to Jesus! Do you remember the exchange between the Jews and Jesus in John chapter 8? Jesus spoke justification by faith language to the Jews in John 8:31-32, **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** How does someone know that they are free from the bondage of sin? How do they know that they are truly one of Christ’s? If they abide in His word. What does that mean? In short, it means to believe that what He says is true, and to live within those parameters. Believers will conform their thoughts, words and actions towards the things of Christ. They will spend their lives in worship to Him. A Christian must know the truth first, affirm its truth, and follow it. You cannot be a disciple of Christ any other way. You cannot be a disciple of Christ and not know the scriptures. You cannot follow Christ if you don’t know where He wants you to go, and what He wants you to do. You cannot follow Christ while having Him follow you while you live out your own heartfelt version of Christianity.

So Jesus tells the Jews that abiding in His word is how they can truly be His, and be free from sin. Their response to Him, **“We are Abraham’s offspring and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”** Seriously? Hmmm...never been enslaved to anyone? Have you read a history book? You’re constantly in and out of bondage! Of course Jesus wasn’t referring to physical bondage but freedom from the eternal death sentence of sin. The truth of the gospel is that God has paid the ransom for the sin of His people, making a way for a right and eternal relationship to exist between an unholy people and Himself. The truth of the gospel is that this reconciliation is a free gift of His grace, to be accepted by faith, to His glory alone. But what was their response? *“I don’t know who you think you’re talking too Jesus! We’re Jewish! God made a promise to save us long ago through Abraham our father. We’re good! There’s no problem here! Go talk to those Gentiles over there about their problem.”* Jesus spells out the sin problem next, 8:34-38, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from you father.”**

Jesus makes it plain, sinner’s sin because they are enslaved to sin. And enslaved sinners require freedom. If the Son sets them free, they are free indeed. Salvation is always and only from the Lord. The Jews placed their hope in Abraham their father. Again they responded, verse 39, **“Abraham is our father.”** Jesus pulls the rug out from under their feet next, **“If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.”** A few verses earlier, Jesus made a comment about His Father, and distinguished His Father from their father, which they probably understood to be Abraham. Now Jesus gets a little clearer, *“You’re not doing what Abraham did, you’re doing what your father did.”* They catch Jesus’ drift that He’s saying they’re not legitimate children of God through Abraham, so they fire back in verse 41, **“We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”** Their answer, *“We know our history, we know our lineage. God is our Father. We’re justified.”* Jesus’ responded, **“If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here...You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”**

In what can likened to what we see with our neighbors down south, who think that they’re the kings of the earth because, *“We’re ‘Merica!”* (sorry Steve, I am kidding...a little) The Jews had an air about them,

a certain nationalistic pride that caused them to perceive themselves to be the center of the known universe. They figured themselves to be not only children of Abraham up the old family tree, but they also understood their bloodline to have united them to Abraham spiritually too. Jesus made it clear to them that they were children of the devil, as evidenced in their behavior. Their method of worship to God (a blend of ritual and tradition, and heavy-burden laws that they invented to keep) was exactly in the manner of their father Cain, who likewise chose to worship God in his own way. Jesus' point is that those who are the true children of Abraham are those who worship God in the manner that Abraham did, by obeying God with their life, giving fruit that they believe God's word. As we have heard from the pulpit here many times before, our salvation truly is by faith alone, but that faith is never alone. Proper works always accompany the faith-claim. If I claim to be an apple tree, yet all I produce is acorns, I'm not truly an apple tree, regardless of my heartfelt claim. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said that we will recognize healthy trees (true believers) by their fruits. (Matt. 7:20)

Paul wrote in Romans 9:6-8, **"For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."** The standard of righteousness have never had anything to do with bloodline. The standard of righteousness has always been Jesus Christ. And it is faith in Him, both future faith in a coming Messiah, and faith looking back at the accomplished work of Christ that saves. Do you remember Romans 4:11 that we read a few pages ago? Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness before he was circumcised. What was the purpose of that? **"The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well."**

Abraham is the father, or the pattern, of not only justification by faith alone, but he is also the example of right living in accordance with that faith. There is always a family resemblance between a father and his child. Any who claim to be a child of Abraham will show evidence of that family link through their faith and obedience. Hebrews 11:8-10, **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."** Later in verses 17-19, **"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."**

Abraham followed God even when the details were fuzzy, even when the directions weren't clear, even when his future was uncertain, even when he was asked to kill the son he had waited nearly one hundred years of his life to have, the son that God promised His covenant blessing with. Abraham believed God! And he knew that God knew all the details. And he knew that God never breaks a promise. And he knew that even if he went through with the sacrifice of Isaac, that God could bring him back from the dead, even though no one had even seen or heard of a resurrection before! Abraham also knew that he needed a Messiah, and he believed that God would provide a Saviour from sin, and he was thankful for that. Jesus told the unbelieving Jews in John 8:56, **"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."** This was the faith of Abraham.

Now let's flip our Bibles back to Galatians and pick up the text again in 3:7, **"Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham."** Paul is stealing Jesus' line and making the same application. Who is a genuine child of Abraham? Only those who are genuine believers in Jesus Christ, who place their faith in Him alone, and who live in repentant obedience to Him. Therefore, those Jews who rejected Jesus Christ proved themselves to be illegitimate children of Abraham, whereas those believing Gentiles would be grafted into the olive tree. (cf. Rom. 11:17)

Galatians 3:8, **"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'"** Paul references in his own words Genesis 12:3, where the Lord is calling Abram and sending him off to the land which he will show him. God is making a covenant with Abram, and in verse 3 the Lord promises him, **"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** Have you ever heard someone say that God tried to deal with the Jews, but His patience ran out, so He gave up on them and sought after Gentiles? I've heard people refer to the Jews as a failed 'Plan A', and the church age as God's slightly more successful 'Plan B'. God never has or needs a 'Plan B'. When God makes his covenant with Abram, He tells him the gospel news that *every nation shall be blessed in Abram.*" Both Jew and Gentile will be the recipients of the gospel grace of God. Gospel grace! We get what we don't deserve in justification, being justified through our Redeemer.

Galatians 3:9, **"So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."** This verse serves as a summary of the last few verses concerning Abraham's justification by faith alone. Everyone who places their faith in God will share the same blessing that Abraham also received for his faith in God, justification. In a pictorial sense, we are children of Abraham, and in another sense, we are sibling recipients of the same grace through the same faith. John MacArthur writes, *"When Gentiles are saved, they are saved as Gentiles, just as Jews are saved as Jews. But no one from either group is saved or not saved due to racial or ethnic identity. Those who are saved are saved because of their faith, and those who are lost are lost because of their unbelief. A Gentile has absolutely no advantage in becoming a Jew before he becomes a Christian. In fact, by expecting salvation through the rite of circumcision, a person, whether Jew or Gentile, nullifies the grace of God and declares, in effect, that 'Christ died needlessly.'"*<sup>1</sup>

Galatians 3:10-12, **"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed by everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.'"**

The Gentile Galatians believers had before them the Judaizers proclaiming their urgent need to be circumcised, convert to Judaism, and obey the Mosaic law in order to obtain justification before God. And yet Paul has just shown through a simple reading of the Old Testament that Abraham was justified before God many years *before* he was circumcised. In fact, Abraham, his sons (and countless others) were justified before God hundreds of years before the Mosaic law was even *given* by God, let alone obeyed. Justification has never been centered around circumcision, or received through obedience to the law.

Paul has just shown from the Old Testament that justification has always been by faith alone, now he will make his point by showing how works of the law cannot ever save. The Judaizers held the law

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John *New Testament Commentary: Galatians* Moody, 1987 p.75-76

supremely above all else, their hope was found in their law-keeping. So Paul exposes their reliance on their obedience to the law as placing a curse upon them. Just the opposite of saving them, it damned them! Assuming the retort from them about possessing the law, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 to prove his point, **“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”** The point of the curse was the surprise of the hour. The Judaizers knew that they were sinners. That took no convincing. Their mistake was that they thought God judged the heart of the sinner. They thought that God would overlook their short-comings of obedience. Paul’s purpose is to expose that the curse from God, the divine judgement from God, is upon everyone who doesn’t *perfectly* keep the law. Absolute perfection is the divine standard, and it always has been. Jesus finished what we now know as Matthew chapter 5 with these words, **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (v. 48). These words come on the heel of His teachings on the sermon on the Mount, where He addressed the error of the traditions of the people, **“You have heard that it was said...”** (v.21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Jesus spoke the timeless, authoritative truth to them on every point, **“But I say to you.”** Was Jesus changing the law? Was He re-writing the law? He said in verse 17, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** When wasn’t changing a word of the law. When He said, **“But I say to you”**, He was speaking the timeless truth of the His own law. Jesus essentially said, *“You think you’re keeping the law concerning your temper, you’re interpretation of the law is incorrect, here is the standard that has always stood, and you’re guilty of murder. You think you’re not guilty of adultery, you are. You think you’re the standard of love, you have much hate in your heart.”* On every point Jesus exposed to them their sin. And the summary of their sin was a comparison of their life to the standard, **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

MacArthur writes, *“That perfection is also utterly impossible in man’s own power. To those who wonder how Jesus can demand the impossible, He later says, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). That which God demands, He provides the power to accomplish. Man’s own righteousness is possible, but is so imperfect that it is worthless; God’s righteousness is impossible for the very reason that it is perfect. But the impossible righteousness becomes possible for those who trust in Jesus Christ, because He gives them His righteousness.”*

This is the standard that Paul is highlighting back in our text. Notice in verse 10 how everyone is cursed who does not abide by **“all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”** Trying hard and having the occasional slip-up is not the standard for justification. “Not being perfect” but doing your best to “love everyone” is not the standard. Absolute perfection is the standard. God has always desired to see people reach the point in their mind where they realize their absolute inability to be perfect before Him. It is only when we recognize our spiritual bankruptcy that we will see just how good the good news of the gospel really is! For someone to rest in their law-keeping, they had better be prepared to keep it perfectly, **“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”** I’ve heard it somewhere said that keeping the law perfectly is similar to presenting a pane of glass to Christ on the Day of Judgment. If every sin that we ever committed were the equivalent to throwing a rock at the pane of glass, it would only take one sin to shatter the entire pane. This is a picture of the point that James is making, it is impossible to present a perfect pane before our Lord.

The legalistic Jews were twisted in their thinking. By following the traditions of their fathers in the faith, they had reached the conclusion that they could work their way into Heaven. Paul said about them in Romans 10:2-4, **“For I bear witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**

**For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**" There are two options for everyone concerning righteousness: Submit to the law and let it kill you, or submit to God's grace in Christ (God's perfect obedience to His own law, and substitutionary death in our place) and live.

Paul writes in verse 11, **"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith'".** Again Paul appeals to the Old Testament in order to prove that righteousness has always been reached by faith alone. This time he quotes the prophet Habakkuk, **"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."** (2:4) Paul quoted Deuteronomy in verse 10 to show that righteousness couldn't possibly come through law-keeping, and now he quotes Habakkuk to show that righteousness can only come through faith!

Paul continues in verse 12, **"But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.'"** In rapid fire, Paul quotes another Old Testament verse, this time Leviticus 18:5, **"You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."** Paul says that the law is not of faith. What does he mean by that? He's saying that the two are mutually exclusive. IOW, you're either righteous because you kept the law, or you're righteous because God kept the law in your place, but you can't have both. God set the perfect standard back in Leviticus. The Judaizers wanted to promote the necessity of law-keeping for righteousness before God, and therefore Paul has shown through Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Habakkuk (to name a few) that righteousness is possible, through a perfect keeping of the law.

Galatians 3:13-14, **"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'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."**

Verse 13 begins by speaking of Christ redeeming people. What does that mean? It's a word that we hear often, and sing often in our hymns, but do we recognize its meaning? We use the word in our culture today, typically in reference to a coupon. We bring a piece of paper, (or cardboard in the case of a cereal box) to the grocery store, and we can purchase items at discounted prices (or sometimes for free) because of the coupon. The item at the store transfers from their possession to mine, because I redeemed it with the coupon. The meaning of the word was still a marketplace word back in Paul's day, but it was most commonly used in the slave market. A person could purchase a slave from their owner, obviously transferring their services and making them their own slave. This is precisely the meaning of the redemption that Christ accomplished for us. We were once slaves to sin (dead in sin, hopeless of attaining righteousness through the law), and now Christ has redeemed us at the cost of His own life. We are now enslaved to Him. He owns our lives, he is our commander, our Lord. He is the One that we serve with our lives. We serve His purposes, which involves obedience to His law, but not in an effort to be righteous. Our obedience is a fruit of the righteousness that He has accomplished already for us.

Our text in verse 13 tells us that Christ redeemed us from **"the curse of the law"**. Everyone is under this curse of the law. Why is the law a curse? Paul has already proven that the law kills. He says is clearly in Romans 7:7-25. Christ redeemed us from the curse of death from the law by becoming the recipient of the curse Himself on the cross. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 21:22-23, **"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on a tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God."** Paul's quote in verse 13 is, **"Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."**

In ancient Judaism, a criminal guilty of a crime that deserved the death penalty would be stoned, and tied to a post made of wood (a type of tree) in order for all to see his shame, and the wrath of God that was against him for his crime. His curse for his crime was to be hung on a tree. It was his sin that put him there. In this manner, Jesus was placed on the tree in our stead, except it was our sin that put Him there. 1 Peter 2:24, **“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.”** Jesus Christ has taken the curse of the law upon Himself for us! This is the good news of the gospel! He has satisfied the wrath of God, and made us one with Him!

Galatians 3:14, **“So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”** All of the blessing of Abraham comes to us (the Gentiles) through our faith in Christ alone. The faith that justifies is the faith that realizes its own inability to save, and loses all confidence to impress God with self-righteousness. The faith that justifies is also the faith that relies completely upon God for righteousness, and submits to His revealed will, His provision, and His power. The faith that saves is also the faith that humbly accept the free gift of sins forgiven provided by God’s mercy and grace. Justifying faith doesn’t have to be strong faith, it just has to be faith in the truth of God’s Word. God doesn’t require a theological depth of the ocean to be saved, but he does require faith in the truth, faith that a child could even comprehend and put its trust in. (Matt. 18:1-6)

Believers who have placed their faith in Christ alone for justification, as did Abraham, receive the promised Holy Spirit into their heart. Along with this indwelling Spirit comes **“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”** The entirety of our salvation has been accomplished by God so that we can echo back praises to Him for eternity. God has saved us **“For the praise of His glorious grace”!** Why did God save us? People who think they are good wonder how God could send anyone to Hell. Those of us who recognize their sin wonder how God could save anyone! He saves some because He is gracious. Romans 9:22-24, **“What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory—even us who He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.”** God’s glorious grace shines bright against the backdrop of man’s sinfulness. May God receive all the glory in salvation from every mouth in every tribe and tongue both now and forevermore!