

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Old Testament Faith – 22-28 July 2017

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). Scripture tells us that He was made to be sin for us, yet He "knew no sin;" He carried our sins "in His own body," yet He "did no sin." That He did carry our sin in Him, being made sin for us, yet did no sin, is to His everlasting glory and our eternal salvation from sin.

Sunday: The Foolish Galatians – Paul asks those who are departing from God and His truth, "Who hath bewitched you?" (Galatians 3:1). Their rebellion was witchcraft: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Looking up this text in the Bible, you will see in both instances the words "is as" are added. The literal Hebrew is, 'Rebellion the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness iniquity and idolatry.' And how so? – Plainly enough, for stubbornness and rebellion are rejection of God; and he who rejects God, puts himself under the control of evil spirits. All idolatry is devil-worship. "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils" (1 Corinthians 10:20). There is no middle ground. Christ says, "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Disobedience, transgression, rejection of the Lord, is the spirit of antichrist.

The apostle asked further probing questions of the Galatians, saying: "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). Foolish is but a feeble term for it. The man who has not power to begin a work, has strength to finish it! Impossible. Who has power to beget himself? – No one; we come into this world without having begotten ourselves; we are born without strength; and, therefore, all the strength that ever manifests itself in us, comes from another than ourselves. It is all given to us. The new-born babe is the representative of man. "A man is born into the world" (John 16:21). All the strength that any man has of himself is found in the infant as it utters its first cry with its first breath. And even that feeble strength is not of itself. Even so in things spiritual. "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth" (James 1:18). We can no more live righteous lives by our own strength than we could beget ourselves. The good work that is begun by the Spirit, must be carried to completion by the Spirit. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14). "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). And Jesus Christ alone can do it.

Monday: Grounded in Scripture – "Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:4-5). These questions show the experience of the Galatians had been as deep and as real as would be expected from those before whose eyes Christ was openly crucified. The Spirit had been given to them, miracles had been wrought among them, and even by them, for the gifts of the Spirit accompany the gift of the Spirit; and as the result of this living Gospel among them, they had suffered persecution; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). This makes the case the more serious. Having shared the sufferings of Christ, they were now departing from Him; and this departure from Christ, through whom alone righteousness can come, was marked by disobedience to the law of truth. They were insensibly but inevitably transgressing the law to which they were looking for salvation.

Tuesday: Reckoned as Righteous – The questions asked in verses 3, 4, and 5 of the third chapter of Galatians suggest their own answer. The Spirit was ministered, and miracles were wrought, not by works of law, but by "the hearing of faith," that is, by the obedience of faith, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Thus Paul's labour, and the first experience of the Galatians, were exactly in line with the experience of Abraham, whose faith was accounted for righteousness. Let it be remembered that the "false brethren" (Galatians 2:4) who preached "another gospel," even the false gospel of righteousness by works, were Jews, and claimed Abraham for their father. It would be their boast that they were children of Abraham, and they would appeal to their circumcision as proof of the fact. But the very thing upon which they relied as proving them to be children of Abraham, was proof that they were not; for "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Abraham had righteousness of faith before he was circumcised (Romans 4:11). "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). Abraham was not justified by works (Romans 4:2-3), but his faith "wrought righteousness" (Hebrews 11:33).

Wednesday: The Gospel in the Old Testament – Paul says, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham" (Galatians 3:8). Understanding of this verse will guard one against many errors. And it is not difficult to understand; simply hold to what it says, and you have it. For one thing, the verse shows us that the Gospel was preached at least as early as the days of Abraham. And it was God Himself who preached it; therefore, it was the true and only Gospel. It was the same Gospel that Paul preached; so that we have no other Gospel than that which Abraham had. The Gospel differs in no particular now from what it was in Abraham's day, for his day was the day of Christ – to Jews who said Abraham is their father, Christ testified: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). God requires just the same things now that He required then, and nothing more.

The Gospel was preached to the Gentiles, for Abraham was a Gentile. He was brought up as a heathen, (Joshua 24:2), and was one till the Gospel was preached to him. So the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles was no new thing in the days of Peter and Paul. The Jewish nation was taken out from among the

heathen, and it is only by the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen that Israel is built up and saved (see Acts 15:14-18; Romans 11:25, 26). Thus we see that the apostle takes the Galatians, and us, back to the fountain-head, to the place where God Himself preaches the Gospel to us Gentiles. No Gentile can hope to be saved in any other way or by any other gospel than that by which Abraham was saved. The Gospel was summed up to Abraham in these words: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Now the blessing of Abraham was the blessing of sins forgiven, and of righteousness by faith (see Romans 4:6-11). This faith was personal faith in Christ crucified and risen, as we learn from Acts 3:25-26: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." "All nations" are included in this blessing; and hence we are again brought to the fact that there is no gospel for any people under heaven except the Gospel that was preached to Abraham (see Acts 4:12). The blessing comes to all, but this is not accepted by all.

"So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." That blessing is: their sins are forgiven, and the Lord "will not impute sin" to them. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). So, then, the Lord will not impute transgression of the law to those who are of faith. But the Lord will deal justly, and will tell the truth; therefore, when the Lord does not impute sin to anybody, that shows that he has no sin, or, in other words, he is not a transgressor of the law, and if not a transgressor of the law, then he is a keeper of the law. Again, we come back to the point that justification by faith means nothing else than being made righteous, or doers of the law, by faith. The blessing is "in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

Thursday: Redeemed From a Curse – Note the sharp contrast in Galatians 3 verses 9 and 10. "They which be of faith are blessed," but "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Faith brings the blessing; works bring the curse, or, rather, leave one under the curse. The curse is on all, for "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Faith removes the curse. Who are under the curse? – "As many as are of the works of the law." Note that it does not say that those who do the law are under the curse, for saying so would be a contradiction of Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (Psalm 119:1). So, then, they that are of faith are keepers of the law; for they that are of faith are blessed, and those who do the commandments are blessed. By faith they do the commandments. The Gospel is contrary to human nature, and so it is that we become doers of the law, not by doing, but by believing. "The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a Stumbling-stone and Rock of Offense; and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Romans 9:30-33). What in this context is the Curse?

No one can read Galatians 3:10 carefully and thoughtfully without seeing that the curse is transgression of the law. Disobedience to God's law is itself the curse; for "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Romans 5:12). Sin has death wrapped up in it. Without sin death would be impossible, for "the sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56). "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Why? Is it because the law is a curse? – Not by any means. Why then? – Because it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10). Mark it well: They are not cursed because they do the law, but because they do not do it. So, then, we see that being of the works of the law does not mean that one is doing the law. No; "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). All are under the curse, and he who thinks to get out by his own works, remains there. The curse consists in not continuing in all things that are written in the law; therefore, the blessing means perfect conformity to the law. This is as plain as language can make it.

Blessing and Cursing – "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him; for He is thy life" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). What does it mean to us? – Have you fully grasped the meaning of all this? Do you see what it means to us? Do you realise what the blessing of the Lord is? It is righteousness, perfect harmony with God's perfect law. This is the blessing of Abraham, which he obtained by the faith of Christ, and which faith is offered to all men of all nations; it is freedom from sin! "Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves" (Titus 3:5), but by the "works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Backslider or sinner of the world, whoever you are: you have desired to do right, to 'live a better life,' but you have not been able. Well, there is One, and only One, who can live that better life, and that is Christ. He can impart to you the blessing of obedience of righteousness. "He is thy life;" therefore take Him, submit to Him, and He will live in you that blessed better life that will make you a blessing.