

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

REDEEMED  
FEBRUARY 8-14, 2015



### MAIN POINT

Don't trust in your performance or your pedigree—trust in Christ alone.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. When was the hardest you have ever worked? What motivated you to work so hard?
2. In what area of your life do you get the most reward for your hard work? Your job? Your parenting? Your relationships? Your physical fitness? In what area do you get the least amount of return on your investment?

**Leader:** In most areas of our lives, our success directly correlates to how hard we work. It is no wonder we have such a hard time accepting that our relationship with God isn't performance-based. When we understand that our salvation happens by grace through faith in Him alone and we can't do anything to earn or lose it, we're set free from the works that enslave us. Early Christians struggled to apply this truth to their lives just as we do.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

#### > HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:1-5.

**Leader:** The church at Galatia had been assaulted by false teachers who sought to undermine the gospel of Jesus Christ. In chapter 1, Paul said, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). Paul's letter sought to demonstrate the error in their teaching and challenge the members of the church to hold fast to the gospel he had preached to them. In chapter 3, Paul asked the Galatian believers a series of questions designed to help them see the folly of the false teaching leading them astray. These questions focused on how they were saved.

3. Why is Paul's question in verse 2 so crucial? How would you state his question in your own words? What does Paul mean when he talks about "observing the law"?
4. Why do you think we so often fall into the trap of trying to advance our standing with God by what we do and what we believe? What is foolish about trying to impress God with our good works?

**5. Paul wasn't taking issue with the religious works the people were doing, but with the motives behind their works. What was wrong with the motives of the Galatians? What motivates you?**

**Leader:** The believers in the Galatian church started out well, but we learn from Paul's letter that many had fallen into a trap that tempts us all—legalism. Legalism is the belief that we must fulfill certain requirements in order to gain God's favor. Even though we know we're saved by grace through faith, we still try to make ourselves better in an effort to earn God's love and blessings. The Galatian church was under the influence of false teachers known as Judaizers, who taught that people had to keep the Jewish Old Testament laws even after becoming Christians. Their teaching negated Christ's gracious work on the cross to forgive us of our sins and restore us to a right relationship with God.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:6-9.

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**Leader:** In proving his argument for salvation by grace through faith, Paul moved from an argument based on the Galatians' experience to an argument based on the teachings of Scripture. The first argument Paul used from Scripture was the example of Abraham, the first of the Old Testament patriarchs (Genesis 15:1-6).

**6. In Paul's day people were tempted to try to impress God by observing religious rights and rituals like circumcision and Passover. What religious acts or rituals are Christians tempted to utilize today in order to try to advance their standing with God? How might such thinking hinder our spiritual growth? Our witness?**

**7. What does the example of Abraham tell us about the relationship between faith and righteousness?**

**Leader:** Quoting from Genesis 15:6, Paul reminded the Galatians that Abraham's acceptance by God was rooted in his faith alone. If keeping the law were necessary for salvation, then Abraham would not have been declared justified by faith. Paul pointed to Abraham's experience to prove salvation is and always has been by faith. While Abraham's faith looked forward in history to the cross, our faith today looks back in history to the cross. Although God had instructed Abraham to be circumcised as a sign of his covenant relationship with God, Abraham received that instruction after God had accepted him on the basis of his faith. Therefore, the true children of Abraham spiritually are not those who are circumcised outwardly but those who exercise faith inwardly.

Many people today confuse outward signs of a spiritual relationship with the genuine relationship itself. For example, while baptism is an outward symbol of the believer's faith, it has no power to make us accepted by God. It is a picture of the inward transformation that occurs when a person accepts Christ as Savior; it is not a means of salvation. On the basis of faith, we, too, enter into a right relationship with God and experience the blessings of knowing Him.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:10-14.

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**8. What punishment from God do you deserve as a result of your sinful nature? Why can't works set you free from sin's curse? How does Jesus solve the problem that no one can earn right standing with God?**

**Leader:** The Bible refers to one who has been saved by faith in Jesus Christ as justified. Justification describes salvation from a legal perspective. God justifies the believing sinner at the moment of salvation by declaring that

person righteous on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. Justification is granted by God on the basis of His grace and not through human effort. When God justifies us, He pardons all our sins, thus removing the separation our sins have caused between us and Himself.

**9. What would you say in response to someone who says, "If salvation is by grace, then good works don't matter"?**

**10. Why do we sometimes struggle to accept that our relationship with God is a gift that comes through faith and not through our good works?**

**Leader:** We might think if salvation is by grace, then our works don't matter. The opposite, however, is actually the case. If God truly has given Himself up on the cross to make atonement for our sins, then we are His. If God has saved us by grace and purchased us unto Himself (1 Cor. 6:20), then there is nothing He cannot ask of us. When we truly understand the depths of God's grace, we will not try to take advantage of His grace but rather find joy in declaring His grace and applying it to our lives.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**11. Take the time necessary to ask two or three people to share their experience of becoming a believer in Christ. Ask them: How is your story a reminder of the importance of God's grace?**

**12. What are appropriate motives for obeying God's laws and practicing spiritual disciplines? How do they point us to the grace of God in Christ?**

**13. What is one step you could take toward serving Christ and others out of love for Him rather than out of a desire to earn His love? How might we as a group help each other be more mindful of God's grace?**

**Leaders Note:** When we try to serve God and others from a works-based mentality, we will fail to honor both God and our neighbors. A works-based mentality is rooted in self—when we live by works we are more interested in getting good things from God than we are in God Himself. We all tend to default to a works-based mentality. Therefore, it is essential that we surround ourselves with believers who are committed to helping us examine the motives with which we serve God and others.

### PRAYER

Thank God for sending Christ on our behalf, freeing us from bondage to the law. Thank God for giving us the law, which shows us what righteousness and holy living look like. Thank God for the Holy Spirit's daily presence in our lives to guide, convict, and comfort us as we seek to live by faith. Thank God for the opportunity to share the gospel with others who may be trying to earn their salvation.

**FOLLOW UP**

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **How have you lived by faith instead of by works this week?**
  - **Is there an area of your life where you might be doing good things with wrong motives? How might your motives need to change? Take some time to pray that God would give you a heart that longs to honor and glorify Him rather than one that simply wants Him to recognize your hard work and effort.**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Galatians 3:11.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

GALATIANS 3:1-14

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3:1. Using a tough love approach, Paul described the Galatians as foolish for allowing themselves to be deceived by the “faith plus” crowd, the false teachers who were demanding that Gentiles be circumcised and observe the law of Moses in order to be saved. In describing the Galatians as foolish, Paul did not mean that they were lacking in intellectual ability, but rather, in spiritual discernment. However, instead of being sharp and vigilant, the Galatians were careless and lazy. It was as if someone had charmed or bewitched them into believing false teachings. The Greek term translated bewitched means “to cast a spell” or “to hold spellbound by irresistible power.” The form of the Greek verb translated crucified stresses the finality of what happened on the cross. Jesus was crucified once and for all. The work of redemption was completed through His death and resurrection, and never needs to be supplemented.

3:2. The gift of the Holy Spirit is powerful evidence of our salvation (Rom. 8:16) and God’s guarantee of eternal glory (Eph. 1:13- 14). Therefore, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the reality of the new birth are inseparable. Paul reminded believers in Galatia that they had received the Holy Spirit, but wondered if they had forgotten the basis on which they received Him. Had they received the Spirit by faith or by keeping the law? Paul knew, as did the Galatians, that they had received eternal life as a gift—not by human efforts or merit. The transformation from death to life was enacted by divine power. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can transform a spiritually dead person into a person who is spiritually alive and knows the living God. Therefore, Paul questioned how his readers could have personally experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit solely on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, yet later allow themselves to be persuaded that something more was required.

3:3. At the time of their conversions, the Galatian Christians depended solely on the Spirit’s power to bring them into a right relationship with the living God. They had received the Holy Spirit as a gift, not as a reward. Any higher kind of life the false teachers may have been promoting was really a step backwards, given that because they were rejecting God’s grace and relying on human effort.

3:4. Paul might have been thinking that these Galatian believers could reduce the degree of persecution they experienced for their faith by accepting circumcision, since that ritual act would have given the appearance that they were proselytes to Judaism. If so, Paul would then have been questioning the Galatians’ logic in turning to a ritual that could have spared them from persecution in the first place. Although Paul evidently viewed the situation in the Galatian churches as desperate, it was not hopeless.

3:5. For God to give . . . His Spirit is an act of incredible grace. The Greek verb translated give means “to provide or furnish something at one’s own expense.” The term was used to denote the actions of financial underwriters of Greek plays. The noun translated miracles literally means “power.” God’s miracles demonstrate His power. The Galatian believers had received the Spirit and experienced God’s miraculous power through faith.

3:6. In proving his argument for justification by faith, Paul moved from an argument based on the Galatians’ experiences to an argument based on the teachings of Scripture. The first argument Paul used from Scripture was the example of Abraham. Paul reminded the Galatians that Abraham’s acceptance by God was rooted in his faith alone. Paul pointed to Abraham’s experience to prove that salvation is and always has been by faith.

3:7. The Judaizers were teaching that in order to share in the blessings promised to Abraham, the Galatians must submit to the sign of the covenant made with Abraham—circumcision. Paul countered that false teaching by emphasizing that believers become rightly related to God the same way Abraham did—not through circumcision, but through faith. Thus, Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised. All that was required was their faith in Jesus Christ.

3:8-9. The true children of Abraham are those who have been declared righteous by faith. Abraham was a man of faith. By faith, this patriarch entered into a right relationship with God and received God’s blessings. On the basis of faith, we, too, enter into a right relationship with God and experience the blessings of knowing Him.  
3:10. Referring to Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul declared that obedience to every part of the law is required.

Otherwise, the offender suffers the law's punishment. No matter how upright the lawbreaker has been otherwise, the offender must bear the curse of the law because of one violation.

3:11-12. The Bible refers to one who has been saved by faith in Jesus Christ as justified. A greater understanding of the term can help us better appreciate the richness of God's salvation. Justification describes salvation from a legal perspective. Justification is granted by God on the basis of His grace, not through human efforts to please Him (Rom. 3:24). When God justifies us, He pardons all our sins, thus removing the separation our sins have caused between us and Himself.

God provides justification through faith, not by means of works or by keeping the law. None of us could be justified by works, because all of us are lacking in amount and quality. Neither can we be justified by keeping the law, because none of us can keep it perfectly. Justification is promised only through faith—not through works or the law. Emphasizing that the law is not based on faith, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12. Paul also cited Habakkuk 2:4 in support of his defense of justification by faith (Gal. 3:11). Such faith is not merely mental assent to certain historical facts, but genuine acceptance in the heart of God's gift of eternal life (Rom. 10:9).

3:13. As believers, we have been redeemed or "purchased" by Jesus Christ, and thus delivered from the curse that our sins deserve. The Greek word translated redeemed literally means "to set free by paying a price." Christ paid the price to free us from the penalty of sin (1 Cor. 6:20). In describing the redemption Christ made available by His death on the cross, Paul referred to Deuteronomy 21:23. Although Christ was without sin, both the fact and the manner of His death brought Him under the curse of the law. Death by crucifixion was the most degrading and painful form of capital punishment in the ancient world.

3:14. This verse summarizes two benefits of Christ's atoning death which Paul has set forth in Galatians 3: (1) the blessing given to Abraham extends not only to Jews, but also to Gentiles who place their faith in Christ, and (2) the Spirit is given to every believer.