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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 3, verses 6 through 14. Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, know then that it is those of faith who 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,

01:11

Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, cursed be the one 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.

01:39

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. This is the word of the Lord.

02:03

I'm going to show you a video. This is Scotty Scheffler. He's the number one golfer in the world. And this is him giving a press conference at the British Open, which is the top golf tournament in Britain and is one of the top four golf tournaments in the world. So the number one golfer, top four golf tournament in the world. And this is what he said. Is it

great to be able to win tournaments and to accomplish the things I have in the game of golf yet? I mean, it.

02:31

It brings tears to eyes just to think about because it's literally worked my entire life to become good at the sport and to have that kind of sense of accomplishment, I think is a pretty cool feeling. To get to live out your dreams is very special. But at the end of the day, it's like, I'm not out here to inspire the next generation of golfers. I'm not here to inspire somebody else to be the best player in the world because what's the point? This is not a fulfilling.

02:56

life. It's fulfilling from a sense of accomplishment, but it's not fulfilling from a sense of like the deepest, you know, places of your heart. You know, there's a lot of people that make it to what they thought was going to fulfill them in life. And then you get there and all of a sudden you get to number one in the world. And then they're like, what's the point? And, know, I really do believe that because, you know, what is the point? Like, why do I want to win this tournament so bad? That's something that I wrestle with on a daily basis. It's like, showed up at the Masters every year. It's like, why do I want to this golf tournament so bad?

03:26

Why do I want to win the open championship so badly? I don't know because if I win, it's going to be awesome for about two minutes. And then we're going to get to the next week and it's going to be like, Hey, you won two majors this year. How important is it for you to win the FedEx Cup playoffs? And it's just like, we're back here again. You know? Um, so we really do, we work so hard for such little moments. And, um, you know, I'm kind of a sicko. I love putting in the work. I love being able to practice. I love getting out to live out my dreams, but at end of the day, sometimes I just don't understand the point.

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You know, because I don't know if I'm making any sense or not, but am I not? It's just it's just one of those deals. You know, I love the challenge. I love being able to play this game

for a living. It's it's one of the greatest joys of my life. But does it fill the deepest wants and desires of my heart? Absolutely not.

04:18

Absolutely not.

04:21

Number one golfer in the world. Does it fulfill him? Absolutely not. You you don't see this kind of honesty from athletes like this. That they would admit that what they do for a living is not ultimately fulfilling. It doesn't fulfill the deepest needs and wants of their heart. It doesn't fulfill them and give them a sense of satisfaction. So this kind of honesty was actually refreshing. And it was the talk of the sports. This is about a month ago, OK? This was the talk of the Sports Talk World for about a week.

04:51

They kept reflecting on this honesty that he shared. Because you don't often hear it. You do hear something like it though sometimes. You hear, em for example, just this past week, the coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, Nick Sirianni, is the... The Philadelphia Eagles won the Super Bowl last year, okay? So we have the Super Bowl winning coach, Nick Sirianni, who's being interviewed on the eve of the new season. And as they were interviewing this coach...

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They were asking him about the Super Bowl and he said, I don't care about that. I do not care about it. The guy who won the Super Bowl no longer cares about it and why? He said, we're focused on this season. What happened last season does not matter. And why is that? Why is it number one that this success doesn't fuel Scottie Shuffler and number two, Nick Sirianni doesn't care if he won the Super Bowl. It's because it doesn't last. You know how long it takes for the media to start talking about who's going to win?

05:47

the next championship after a championship happens? You're lucky if you make it to the next morning before they start talking about who's going to win. Scottie's like, it lasts about two minutes. The guy who's at the peak of his profession, and it just doesn't last. Nick Sirianni, the coach of the Eagles, knows that even though he won the Super Bowl last year, if he stinks this year, he'll get fired. This is the kind of pressure that these folks are under. But I don't think it's unique to the sports world, is it?

06:17

this pressure to perform? I think we're all under it to a certain extent. I mean, just think about the world of academia. Students, you you're under pressure to do well in school, to get grades. How long does a good performance on an exam, a project, or a paper last? It lasts until you realize you've got another one that you've also got an A, so you're done, right? Right? If you're a tenured professor, or sorry, if you're professor that is on the tenure track but doesn't have your tenure.

06:47

How much do you have to perform? It's publish or perish. And even if you're a tenured professor, does tenure mean what it used to mean years ago? No, it doesn't. No matter what profession we're in though, I think we understand this pressure to perform. Because many of us, not only in our professional lives, but also in our personal lives, we place our significance on how we're doing. How many of us feel good about ourselves if we're doing well? Like if we're, however we define that.

07:14

doing well in our job, doing well in our home life, if we're productive, if we're doing things that are right and not wrong, whatever it may be. How many of us place our significance in that? And it doesn't matter how many good things you do, right? As soon as something goes wrong, you're a complete failure. This is human nature. This is human nature. And this is what Christian theology calls legalism. Legalism is a term that we use to define the human

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the innate human need to perform and make ourselves feel better through our performance and also to appease God and others through our performance. You know, that doesn't mean we don't seek to do well. Scottie was very clear about that. Scottie's a believer, by the way. That's one of the reasons why he's very in tune with his really deepest needs and desires. But he says, look, I love this game. I am going to work hard. I'm going to practice hard. And I'm going to excel.

08:13

We do that. We work hard, we excel, we do that for the honor of Christ. We do that for the testimony of Christ and just the dignity of who we are. But as soon as we start depending on our performance, for the way, for our significance, for how we feel about ourselves, for how we stand before God and before others, we have lost. Because there's no way to keep it up. There's no way to keep it up. Legalism is not the way. This is essentially the message

08:42

of the text today. As we come to the Apostle Paul and Romans, we see someone who is over and over repeating this message. You can't get by on your own effort. You cannot. It will not work. This is the seventh sermon in this series, and if you're just joining us, this is like the first one that really starts to really hit. This is where Paul starts to spit fire a little bit. Okay? So if you're here with us for the first time,

09:10

you really haven't lost much you can always go back and listen on Spotify we've got all or whatever you listen to podcasts on we've got all of them there or you can go on our website but this is the seventh sermon in our series and what we find ourselves in this little section of Galatians is that Paul gave the thesis for the book at the end of chapter 2 and the thesis for Galatians is justification is not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ that is his point we don't earn favor with God we don't gain our

09:39

ultimate significance through our own efforts but through faith in Jesus Christ. So today we're actually and so after he states that thesis at the end of chapter 2 chapters 3 and 4 are

an extended section of nine arguments for his thesis. He just keeps hitting us with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 all the way up to 9. The first one we saw last time I preached and that was on

10:05

August 17th and the first argument Paul gives at the beginning of chapter 3 is an argument from their experience. He says look, you were saved by faith. How do you think that you can continue by work? So it's their experience. They received the spirit by faith. They saw miracles and wonders by faith. They were persecuted because of their faith. So it's an argument from experience. Today we have an argument from biblical theology to Abrahamic covenant.

10:34

the promise that God gave to Abraham. There's several texts that are mentioned here in this passage, Genesis 12, Genesis 15, and then there's a couple from Deuteronomy. Every scripture he references, Paul, is from the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and he quotes one almost every verse. Here, he's arguing from the Abrahamic covenant that Abraham received the promise by faith. The promise of Abraham was before the law of Moses. Abraham, it says,

11:04

was reckoned righteous by his faith and trust in God before circumcision. So his argument is this precedes it and therefore you don't have to go back to it. I'll get into this a little bit more as we go along. Today we're going to have three points. Three points that Paul draws out from Galatians 3, 6 through 14. The first one is that legalism is stupid. The second is legalism brings a curse. And the third is legalism

11:34

brings debt. So first, legalism is stupid, y'all. It doesn't make any sense. I mean, we've kind of already covered this ground, just logically. In order to depend on your own performance, you have to continue to perform. It's like a gerbil on a wheel. You have to keep running. And what happens if you stop? Plunk, you fall, right? You have to keep going. It makes perfect sense that if you're going to depend on your own effort,

12:01

for your self-satisfaction, your righteousness, it's not going to work. It's not going to work. Paul addresses this by referring to the Abrahamic covenant. He begins in verse 6. He says, look, Abraham was justified by faith. It says in verse 6, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. So Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. He says in verse 7, know then that it those of Abraham

12:30

So it is those of faith that are the sons of Abraham. And verse 8, and the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to him saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. There's two verses quoted here. There's one in verse 6, Genesis 15-6, and then there's the other one in verse 8, which is cited from Genesis 12-3. The argument is this.

12:59

Abraham received was reckoned accounted righteous because of his faith not because of his works The promise of Abraham the promise of God to Abraham preceded the law of Moses The law of Moses is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He won't he'll argue that a little later But Abraham preceded Moses Abraham was justified by faith It doesn't make any sense that you would go to works to justify you as we'll see in a moment because

13:29

Works can't do that. So Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. And then from the other passage in Genesis 12, look, the promise that was given to Abraham, we see it in verse eight, that in you all the nations shall be blessed, that promise that the Gentiles would be blessed, that's us, that's the audience of Paul, the Gentiles, that promise was given to Abraham, not Moses. Look, the promises that the family of Abraham

13:58

will bless all the nations of the earth, will bless the Gentiles. Therefore, if you want to receive Abraham's blessing, it's by faith. It doesn't make any sense to go to works, because works was not how Abraham was justified, and it was not how the Gentiles were to be brought in. legalism is stupid because everyone who tries to live with it is under a curse. Look, it says in verse 10, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, cursed is everyone who does not abide

14:27

by all things written in the book of the law and do them. This is quoted from Deuteronomy 27, 26. He's quoting the Pentateuch again. He's quoting Moses, right, to tell them that if you want to live by the law, if you want to live by your own effort, it only leads to curse. That's what the Bible says. That's what human experience tells us. If you try to live by your own effort, it only leads to failure. It only leads to loss.

14:57

And so, like, legalism doesn't make any sense. But why do we keep doing it? I mean, it's human nature. It's human nature to want to depend on your own effort. It's human nature not to depend on someone else. So while legalism is stupid, faith is smart. Faith is smart. Why is it smart? Because, look, this is how God gave the promise. God gave the promise to Abraham.

15:22

It's smart to go back to that and look at how God created this whole situation where the whole world would be blessed. He did it in Abraham. We are sons and daughters of Abraham. And we are sons and daughters of Abraham by faith. The promise that God will bless the Gentiles came to Abraham. And Abraham was justified by faith. The smart move is to go back to the Abrahamic covenant, not place your significance in works or the Mosaic law.

15:50

It's also smart because as we already said, we can't do it. You cannot fulfill the law in order to be justified. This is Paul giving a Shemite interpretation of the law. Now, if you don't

know what that is, I have a midweek podcast that goes through all these sort of historical details and different rabbinic schools that Paul is engaging with. There were basically two ideas about the law in the time of Paul.

16:19

there was the Hillel School and the Shemaite School. The Hillel School said, well, basically, if you cross the 50-yard line, you're good. Like, if you can obey the law 50 % plus whatever, you're good, right? But the Shemaite said no. And we see James also referring to this idea in the book of James.

16:41

The Shemite said, no, if you're going to live justified by the law, you have to keep the entirety of it perfectly, 100 % of it, all of it. If you're going to live by the law, in other words, in quoting Deuteronomy 27, 26, you have to do all of it. And if you can't keep all of it perfectly, you've transgressed all of it. This is also what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. We looked at the Sermon on the Mount last summer.

17:09

And the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes through the Ten Commandments. And He says, look, you think you're fulfilling the Ten Commandments by keeping some really easy thing, I tell you. And He goes through all these lists of things that how we transgress the commandments in these small ways in our heart and our life. None of us is able to do it. The smart thing is to trust in someone who can and did. That's the smart thing. Faith is the smart plan. Faith is a smart way. We know that someone was able to do it.

17:39

His name was Jesus Christ. He came and he fulfilled the law. He obeyed it perfectly. And for us to place our trust in Him makes a lot of sense. So legalism is stupid. Faith is smart. Second, legalism brings a curse.

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This is what it says in verse 10, for all who rely on the works of law are under a curse.

18:03

It's not that it's just kind of a uh not smart way to live. It's also a way of living that condemns you. It brings you under condemnation. It brings you under shame. If you try to live in a way that basically is perfection, you're not going to be able to do it. So you're going to live under shame. You're going to be a person that lives under shame. You're not going to be able to perform. If you ever do fail, it's going to be like catastrophe. Like how many people do know that catastrophize?

18:34

This way of living by works, of living by the works of the flesh, it brings curse. Not only logically in our lives, but also spiritually. This is what the Bible teaches. If you attempt to live by the works of the law, you're under a curse. This is what adherence to the law brings. It doesn't bring life. You know, as we saw earlier in Galatians, if adherence to the law could save you, why was Christ, why was he crucified?

19:03

That was another dumb thing that should not have happened. If we could be saved by the works of the law, why did he come? Why did he die? Again, adherence to the law, attempt to live by the law only brings curse. Why? Because none of us are able to do it. This is what it says at the end of verse 10. Curse is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law. We're not able to do it. Why does it bring us under a curse? Because we can't.

19:34

And then beyond that, it's not only those that attempt to be justified by the law, it is everyone, verse 11, it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. Because the law, verse 12, is not of faith, rather, the one who does them shall live by them. This is Paul's version of, you you live by the sword, you die by the sword. You want to live by your own effort, you want to live by your own performance?

20:02

You think you can get by on getting a great education, a great job, lots of money, hedge your bets, you know? You think you can do that? Okay, you can try it. What happens when it fails? What happens when it doesn't deliver on the deep needs of your life that you think you don't really need? Because it will fail, I can tell you. It will not deliver. But if you live by the sword, you die by the sword. The one who lives this way will do them shall live by them. So, legalism brings a curse.

20:32

But faith brings blessing. Who doesn't want a blessing? know, blessing is sort of this common word. We use blessing others bless you. People put it on their... some people put it on their walls, know, bless this house, whatever. We want to have a blessing. How do we get a blessing? Paul says the blessing comes by faith. Adherence to works brings curse. This is what it says in verse 6 and 7. It says it is those... verse 7, it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham.

21:02

And then it says in verse 8, uh that uh the blessing at the end of verse 8, in Abraham all the nations will be blessed. Blessing comes by faith. Blessing comes through Abraham. And becoming a child of Abraham happens through faith. And we're going to later see faith and baptism and being united to Christ at the end of this chapter. So blessing comes by faith. And then it says in verse 9, those who are of faith are blessed, along with Abraham.

21:33

The word blessing is repeated. And what are the blessings that we receive? Just in this particular passage, we can enumerate several blessings. One is that we are counted righteous. We are made one with God and at peace with God because of our blessing. We no longer have enmity with God. We can be at one with Him. We can be at peace with Him. We can have a relationship with Him. We no longer sit under guilt and condemnation and shame.

22:02

Faith brings that blessing. The other thing that we see is that the blessing of inheritance. We are brought into the family of God. We are adopted into the family of God and we are given the inheritance as a royal son and daughter. This is, Paul talks about this earlier in Galatians, but it's still true here. We receive the blessing of adoption into God's family. We receive the inheritance of the wealthiest and most powerful being who created the heavens and the earth.

22:31

But we also receive freedom. It says that Jesus redeemed us. He brought us back out of enslavement and freed us from our sins. So the blessing of freedom, the blessing of forgiveness for our sins, the blessing, it says in verse 14, of the Spirit. The blessing of faith brings the Spirit of God to live within our bodies. The living God comes and takes residence in us.

23:01

and we receive the promise. All of these blessings come through faith. None of them come by works. So, legalism brings curse. Faith brings blessing. That inner peace that Scotty was talking about, it's blessing. It's the blessing of God. The blessing of God is what fulfills our hearts, fulfills our lives. It's what we really need. It's what we're all searching for. And that comes by faith, trust in Jesus Christ.

23:30

Thirdly, we see that legalism brings debt. The word debt is not used here explicitly, but several other terms refer to it. We have the word reckoning or accounted used several times in this passage. That's an accounting term. It's a mathematical term. It may be used in finance. You like you keep accounting on a ledger. So it says that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

24:00

His faith wasn't righteousness. God saw his faith and counted it as righteousness, wrote it down on the ledger, if you will, added it up in the column if you're a spreadsheet nerd like

me. It was counted. We have uh other times that this word counted is used here in this passage. We also have reference to it in Isaiah 53, which is alluded to.

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that he was accounted Christ the suffering servant was accounted as a transgressor so we were counted righteous that's in our column Christ is counted as a transgressor that's in that column and then we have this word redemption down in verse 13 redemption is also a sort of transactional financial term it means to buy something back like all the soda bottles and cans that you may get they all have a little number on the bottom five cents ten cents whatever it may be

24:54

You can save, you don't have throw those away, you can save them, you can take them to a redemption center and they'll buy them back. You know, this is a redemption center, right? This is where we come to get bought back. Where do we get bought back from? We're bought back from our slavery to sin. So there's debts here and there's credits. So the point is that legalism brings us into debt. This is Paul's point.

25:22

If you want to live by the law, you're going to be in debt. know, you may think of, many of us have seen movies, TV shows where somebody's really, really over their head gambling, right? Probably seen this before, right? You gamble, you're in debt, you double down, you try to get your money back, you just dig yourself further into debt. Keep accruing debts. And you want to change that ledger. This may also happen in business. You may take a loan.

25:50

You may not be successful with what you did with the loan. You may take out another loan to pay for that loan. And all of sudden, you have all these debts. And you need to get into the black. How is it that we, as we have accrued all these debts, as Paul says, as we attempt to live by our own effort, we're never going to be able to do it. So we just keep going

down, and down, and down in the ledger. That's all legalism does is bring us under debt. But he says, faith brings...

26:20

redemption. Faith brings redemption. This is what it says in verse 13. And this is one of the purest statements in the whole Bible of the gospel. 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. This is another reference to the Pentateuch.

26:47

It comes from Deuteronomy 21, 23. Essentially what Paul is saying is that Christ being hung on a tree took on a curse. And because he took on a curse that he didn't deserve, we who are cursed can have our curse traded. Like he took on our curse and he gives us his blessing. And so there's this transaction where our sins are nailed to the tree, as it says in Colossians, and he takes them on. He pays for them all.

27:17

Legalism leads us debt, but faith brings us credit. And that credit is accounted to us because of the righteousness of Christ. How does it work? The righteousness of Christ is traded for our sin, and they're switched. That's a great trade. Our curse is traded with Christ's blessing. That's a really good business deal. Legalism brings debt.

27:45

But faith brings redemption. This is what Martin Luther said about this. This...in his commentary on Psalm 90, was mentioning 2 Corinthians 5. That's a roundabout way, I know, but getting to a quote. He referred to this concept that Christ will become sin. He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become righteousness. This idea that Christ would substitute his righteousness for our sin.

28:14

Martin Luther called that a wonderful exchange. A wonderful exchange. And that is the title of the sermon. That's a wonderful exchange. That's a really good trade. This is what Martin Luther said in his commentary on Galatians, on this very verse, 3.13. He said, for we, we are sinners and thieves, and therefore guilty of death and everlasting damnation. That's what legalism brings. But Christ took our sins upon Him.

28:44

And for them died on the cross, therefore it behooves that he should become a transgressor, as Isaiah said, and be reckoned, there's that word again, counted among the transgressors. There is no doubt, he says, all the prophets did foresee in the spirit that Christ should be accounted the greatest transgressor that could be, having all sins imputed to him.

29:13

For he being made a sacrifice for sin, and deed for the sins of the whole world, is in this respect not an innocent person without sin. And not the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, but a sinner who possesses and carries the sin of Paul, who was a blasphemer and persecutor, and of Peter who denied him thrice, and of David who was an adulterer and a murderer. And to keep it brief, who possesses and bears all the sins of all men and women in his body.

29:43

not that he himself is guilty of any, but that he received them being committed or done by us and laid them upon his own body, that he might make satisfaction for them with his own blood.

29:58

That's a wonderful exchange. Indeed, on the cross, in this beautiful, wonderful exchange, as he takes on a curse to heal us of our curse, as he takes on our sin to exchange it for his righteousness, he is counted as a transgressor.

30:18

In other words, as Luther says, he is Paul the blasphemer and persecutor. He is Peter who denied him thrice. He is David the adulterer and the murderer. He is Zacchaeus the defrauder of his own people. He is Rahab the prostitute. He is Jacob the liar. He is Nicodemus the self-righteous Pharisee. He is the woman at the well. He is Matthew the tax collector. He is Simon the zealot. He is Naaman the Syrian. He is Philip the Ethiopian and moreover.

30:46

He is Augustine the Philanderer, Francis the carouser, John Newton the enslaver.

30:53

He is me. And He is you. He is every one of us on that cross. He was reckoned a sinner so that we could be reckoned righteous. He took our debt and gave us His inheritance. He took our curse and gave us blessing. He took our enslavement and gave us freedom. He took our shame and gave us dignity. He took our death and gave us life. What a beautiful trade. What a wonderful exchange.

31:22

Why would we ever seek to depend on our own effort, on our own merit, on our own performance? We can never measure up. The best in the world can't even do it, but he has. And he freely gives his success to us as a gift. Will you take it? Will you take this gift? Will you live into it?

31:47

Will you give Him your sin and take His righteousness? Will you give Him your shame and take His dignity? Will you give Him your death and take His life?

31:57

Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you? It's the smart move. It's the only move. What a wonderful exchange. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

32:18

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