GALATIANS 3

**Real Series (Part 3)**

**I**

I’m glad you’re joining us today for our third installment in a series we’re calling ***REAL: The Search for Authentic Faith***. We’re going to be studying this morning the third chapter of the Apostle Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. If you have your Bible with you or want to open it up on your digital device, you will find that helpful. Let me try to set us up to understand this text by starting with a brief story.

When I was in the eighth grade, I went each Friday to a class where a teacher named Mr. Frauenthal instructed me in how to use an unfamiliar device called a “typewriter.” Ever heard of those? The machine that sat on my desk looked something like this. Yep, you’ve got proof: I am very old! I remember that it took a lot of effort to punch down the mechanical keys on that device. Each punch would send a little metal typeface hammer slamming against an ink ribbon, thereby imprinting a black letter on some paper rolled around what was called the “carriage.” If you didn’t pound the key hard enough, you had to backspace and strike the key again. I’ll never forget my first typed sentence. It was: **“*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.”*** All the letters of the English alphabet in one sentence!

As all of us Ancient Ones know, using a typewriter took work. When you got to the end of a line, you had to swipe the carriage that held the paper back to its beginning point so you could start a new line. If you made a mistake you had to stop and carefully paint over the erroneous letter with this tiny little brush of something called “Wite-Out.” But difficult as it was, it sure beat writing long essays by hand. By the time I was a sophomore in high school, I could fly on that machine!

I don’t use a typewriter any longer. I wrote this message (and a whole lot of other text this week) on a MacBook Air M2. There’s some strong continuity between my old typewriter and my present word processor. The fundamental letters are still in the same place. The vocabulary I use to form sentences is much the same. But writing involves so much less work and anxiety than before. Why? Because there’s power in the Air that doesn’t come from me and my dogged pounding. I’m no longer so afraid of making mistakes because I know that now they can be graciously corrected or I can even start over. The burden I carry now is literally lighter. My original typewriter weighed over 25 lbs. My MacBook, one-tenth of that.

I’ll always be grateful for Mr. Frauenthal’s typewriter. It provided me with crucial skills, but its greatest value was preparing me for the better way to come. In fact, I think that if you saw me still using a typewriter TODAY, you might think: How foolish, Dan? Who deluded you into going back to that old device?

**II**

In a sense, this is pretty much how the Apostle Paul opens up chapter 3 of his famous letter. He says: **You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?** In other words, I think you must be under some kind of evil spell. Why? Because you’re doing something crazy. You’ve gone back to something old when I clearly introduced you to the new and better reality that transcends it. You seem to have forgotten how much you need God’s grace and how he has supplied it. It is easy to fall under the spell of this world and forget what God has done for us. I encourage you to read the whole of chapter 3 for yourself but let me try to summarize the Big Ideas here.

God’s original and good intention for human beings is that we live by faith in Him. This calling is portrayed beautifully in the story of God’s call to Abraham who had so many reasons to doubt God’s promises and put his trust instead in all the worldly sources of hope. Yet Abraham stepped out in faith. He put his trust in God instead of himself. One of the most famous and life-altering verses of the whole Bible is the 11th verse of Galatians 3. **“The righteous (or just) will live by faith”** in God, rather than by trust in human works. Paul repeats this same verse in his letter to the Romans (1:17) and this same idea is credited by Martin Luther as having been the breakthrough in his understanding of the Christian message that unleashed what we now call the Protestant Reformation.

This idea is the principle difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ and every other worldview. In so many spaces and systems of this world, we are bewitched into thinking that our significance is determined by what our social network or our employer or the condition of our body or the scores on our tests say about us. But God says: Just put your faith in what I say about you, my beloved child.

The world is constantly trying to bewitch you with messages that your satisfaction in life will come from possessions and positions and power. How many of our friends and family and maybe some of us have been under that spell? But God says: Just dedicate yourself to love and servanthood wherever you are and go. Do what my Son models and you’ll find a meaning and joy set before you, even if you must endure a cross.

Paul would say that faith in Christ is the way to REAL significance, satisfaction – and most germane to the focus of Galatians 3 – to real security and salvation. I’m going to be as blunt as Paul is here. Many forms of popular religion or spirituality today bewitch their adherents into thinking that the way to get eternal security and salvation is to earn it through our good deeds or personal righteousness. It is rarely stated openly, but the bewitching message is: God grades on a curve. We just have to pass. We’ll probably score better on the test than a whole lot of others so why really worry? Or let’s work a lot harder. But God says: I don’t grade on a curve. I grade on a Christ – on the standard of holiness you see in Jesus.

So, if you are not living up to his standard, you should stop trusting in your goodness to save you. The righteous will live by faith in Christ. It is the reality of HIS goodness and the authenticity of your relationship with HIM on which your eternal life depends.

Wow. If that’s true – and I believe it is -- then that raises an interesting and very important question: How did it happen and how does it keep on happening that people do not get this? The Galatians apparently didn’t, hence Paul’s tirade in this chapter of his letter. I’m guessing that for some of us today – particularly those of us who come from a highly moralistic tradition on either the Protestant or Catholic side – it’s hard to come out from under the spell that says: It is OUR righteousness that will save us. We’ve got to go to mass or church or confession because God is keeping score. We’ve got to get the kids baptized or espouse the right doctrine or do these other things because God is writing our performance down in the Great Gradebook. We need to do it right or better than others and we’ll be OK. Where did this come from?

Paul would say: It came from the LAW. The notion that we can get right with God by keeping all (or at least enough) of his commandments came from what is known as the Mosaic Law. It came from the very good and wonderful guidelines that God gave to his people Israel when they were living under Emergency Conditions. Do you remember all the laws that we lived under during the COVID Era? Do you recall the temperature taking and the six-foot distancing and the mask-wearing and the disinfecting of surfaces? Were all those laws good for us? Should we still live under those conditions and regard them as our hope?

The people of Israel lived not just two years but forty years under Emergency Conditions. They had left behind the only homeland they’d ever known. They were wandering in a wilderness subject to external marauders and all the internal fights that every family and tight community has under stress. So, God, in his loving-kindness, said, in effect: *I understand this is a very uncertain time. I’m going to give you some very clear parameters and a mediator named Moses to help you through this season.*

God laid out some particular practices that would help Israel stay connected to Him (e.g. the call to observe the Sabbath, honor God’s name and run from idolatry). He gave them some hard rules that would minimize their injuring of others (e.g. the commandment to honor parents and refrain from murder, adultery, theft, lying and coveting). God gave them a variety of guidelines which would eventually take a very racially and ethnically diverse family and shape them into a coherent community. God laid out a set of dietary regulations that would allow Israel to avoid major health risks and preserve the nation over time. And these Ten Commandments and the other legislation that accreted around it, became known as “The Law.” The Jewish people said: *If we keep the law, we will be OK.* But over time, an insidious thing happened. They became bewitched more by keeping the Law than by the connecting to the Lord who had given the guidelines to them.

The big idea I want to stress, because Paul stresses it highly, is thatGod gave Israel the Law as a blessing and not as an ultimate Savior. People in our day continue to be bewitched on this point. We continue to look to the Law to save us. We think: If only we can settle on a President or fund a police force who will enforce the Law more consistently. If only we can have a court that interprets the Law more faithfully. If only we can elect a congress that drafts better laws we will be saved.

But like Israel, we live in a world where the Law can only roughly contain human nature. The Law can’t change human nature. Israel needed a prescription (as all of us do) for not just for restraining the human tendency toward sin, but for processing and converting it. Israel, like us today, surely needed a **Guardian** who would defend what goodness looked like but, even more, it needed a **Governor** to guide us into the life for which we all were made. Tell me whether you agree with me on this: You and I and everybody we know need a CHANGE of our nature if we are going to see the ultimate salvation for which all of us long.

As we move toward a close today, I want to go back to the analogy with which I started this message. Do you remember that I was talking (perhaps strangely) about my eighth-grade experience with a typewriter and my modern-day experience with a word processor? Let me try to tie it all together now and show where I was going.

Putting your faith in your obedience to the moral Law – whether it is the Mosaic Law or the Law of somebody in your social or political network or the Law of your parents or the Law of some moral or religious authority in your background -- is like spending your life trying to write the story of your life on an old typewriter. You can certainly try to do your life from that desk. I know from experience that all of the foundational letters and keystrokes are there.

But it’s going to take a LOT of effort on your part to write a good story. The legalists who are watching you are going to spot every backspace and revision of your story. They’ll see each grammatical error, misspelling or Wite-Out. You can put your faith in your ability to win the allegiance and approval of all these people.

As the Apostle Paul would tell all of us: Someone has entered our reality who doesn’t negate the value of the old typewriter but who has transcended it. I am cautious about making this analogy -- as I know it is below His dignity – but you and I are now no longer subjects of the Law but of the WORD Processor. The divine WORD – the One who spoke reality into existence – has clearly processed our failures fully through his crucifixion. As St. Paul writes: **Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. (Gal 3:1)**. What Paul is saying here is that because of Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice upon the cross you can have faith that your sins and the penalty for them have been deleted.

The Galatians’ sins and yours and mine will continue to be overwritten by Christ’s righteousness. It’s like the auto-replace feature in a word processor has gone into effect over your life and mine. Our Enemy, Satan, stands as our Accuser at the Final Judgment and says: *“God, look at the documents. Look at the horribly inconsistent performance of this person. Look at all the instances where she or he did what shouldn’t have been done or failed to do what should have been done, according to your Law.”*

And God replies to the case of any of us who’ve put our faith in Christ: *I’m sorry but I see this differently now. You’ve said that I ought to look at the sentence that describes “Dan’s sin.” But now, as I read it, that part says, “Christ’s righteousness.”* From now on, God is mainly interested in helping us write a beautiful new story for our lives and supplying us with the power of the Holy Spirit to do that. That’s what Paul figured he’d helped the Galatians understand. That is what I hope YOU understand, because this is the Gospel.

Here is something AUTHENTIC. God is no longer looking at what you and I may have produced on the typewriter of the Law. He’s not concerned about how many errors we have made or our how speedily we’ve managed to type. Whether we’ve helped ***the brown lazy fox jump over the lazy dog*** is of profoundly little concern to God. God’s main interest now is what you and I will do in the response to the WORD Processor and the fact that, because of his sacrifice on the Cross, all the mistakes that can be written over have been and all the great stories that can still come to life through the power of the Holy Spirit still await fulfillment. The question is: What will you write on the page of your future?