

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Galatians 3

¹⁰In fact, those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.” ¹¹Clearly no one is declared righteous before God by the law, because “The righteous will live by faith.” ¹²The law does not say “by faith.” Instead it says, “The one who does these things will live by them.”

¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” ¹⁴He redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we would receive the promised Spirit through faith.

→ Deliverance from the curse is not by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Christ crucified. ←



Disney’s Aladdin was re-released as a live-action movie. This is one in a line of Disney classics from the 1990s – my childhood – that has gone from cartoon to live-action. In the movie, it’s no big reveal that Aladdin is left in a cave with a fancy, old-fashioned lamp. When Aladdin rubs the lamp, a comical genie appears to give Aladdin an escape route and to turn Aladdin into a rich prince.

Let me ask you: What if you rubbed a magical lamp and a genie came out? and when you asked for three wishes, the genie said, “Oh, I’m not that kind of genie. I give advice.” Wouldn’t this be the polar opposite of all genies you ever wanted to stumble upon? That genie would be no good. He would be no better than a fortune cookie or a horoscope or some other false magical cue.

Sadly, many people take God’s Laws for a magical genie. They insist on the goodness of God in all His commands, but fail to realize God’s Laws do not save. That’s because God’s Laws do nothing but require, expect, and demand ... much worse than even giving advice. And when people’s lives finally come to a close, it turns out that relying on the genie of God’s Laws curses them.

But if you knew about that advice-genie, it would surely make you treasure the genie that gives you three wishes. So it really serves our faith in Jesus to ...

RELY ON GOSPEL, NOT LAW

Paul uses three arguments (or premises) to show us the polar opposite of faith, and each one he supports with Scripture.

I. The first one goes like this: “*Those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law’*” (3:10).

St. Paul here does not simply speak about trying to walk in God’s Law.

- To WALK IN the works of the Law is one thing,

○ and to RELY ON / BE OF the works of the Law is quite another thing. TO RELY ON the works of the Law means that you rely on the Law for eternal benefit, trusting and hoping for righteousness in the works of the Law. Trust and hope for righteousness must not stand in the works of the Law, but in the promise of grace. The children of God do the works of the Law, but they do them as true children *gratis*, freely, not for reward, and seeking in them no merit before God.

Those RELY ON the works of the Law, who think they ought to get to heaven because of the virtues which they practice and the works which they do, as if God owes it to them.

- All who trust to themselves that they are pious; all who adhere to the opinion if a man would do right and live right he would fare right.
- All who RELY ON the works of the Law think that God owes them heaven because they are not bad people.
- All who trust for righteousness in what they are and what they do, they all “RELY ON” and “*are of the works of the Law*” (v 10).

The reason why those who seek righteousness by works of the Law are under a curse is because they fail to continue in all things the Law requires. “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law*” (Deut. 27:26). Whoever wants to be justified by works is a debtor to do the whole Law! The Law is continuous and comprehensive. Rely on your ability to do ONE of God’s commandments correctly, then you must rely on your ability to do EVERY one of God’s commands correctly. The Law of God is a package deal.

But so many people will do this. They practice a few virtues, they perform a few good works, and then they think that, on that basis, God should regard them with favor and take them to heaven. The veil of Moses is on their hearts and they are under the curse.

II. Paul’s second argument is comprised in these words: ¹¹*Clearly no one is declared righteous before God by the law, because “The righteous will live by faith.”* ¹²*The law does not say “by faith.” Instead it says, “The one who does these things will live by them.”*

Paul lays down the principle: If someone is justified by the Law, then he is not justified by faith, and if by faith then not by the Law, for these are two things excluding each other and cannot work conjointly. It must be either by the one or by the other, either by the Law or by faith and it cannot be both together. If by the Law then not by faith, and if by faith then not by the Law. Now already in the Old Testament we hear that justification and life is by faith, therefore it is not by the Law.

Why? The Law is not of faith and cannot be kept by faith. It requires works that have to be done to satisfy the Law’s demands. But faith has only to do with the promises of God. Faith is, in fact, nothing but the hand which receives the promised gifts.

Let me explain with this example: “*Share your food with the hungry*” (Isa. 58:7). This command you can never fulfill by saying, “I believe that God is merciful,” or, “I believe that my sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.” Believing those things is not dealing bread to the hungry. To fulfill this command you must go and you must take bread and give it to the hungry. So this command, “*Share your food with the hungry*,” **is not of faith, neither can it be fulfilled by believing**. It is a word of works, because to keep it you must perform the work; you must go and do the act. That’s the way it is with all the commandments of the Law. To keep them you must actually do what is commanded.

On the other hand, it is a word of promise when the Lord says, “*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more*” (Isa. 43:25). This word you cannot keep by feeding the hungry, giving the shirt off your back, building churches, or eating no carbs. This word you can only keep by faith, by believing that the Lord really does what He promises

– blots out your transgressions and remembers your sins no more, for the sake of His suffering and death. As far as it justifies, faith is only concerned with promises and Gospel, not Law.

III. Paul's third argument is this: ¹³*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."* Christ took on the curse for us to redeem us. If by our own works in the Law the curse could have been removed and the blessing obtained, it would have been an unnecessary thing for the Son of God to take on that curse.

Now God does no unnecessary works. Since therefore the Son of God took our curse, it is evident that our own works in the Law could not remove the curse.

When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything, He sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all humanity upon Him, and said to Him: "Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; be the first sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; be the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them."

Now the Law comes and says: "I find Him a sinner, who takes upon Himself the sins of all men. I do not see any other sins than those in Him. Therefore let Him die on the cross!" And so it attacks Him and kills Him. By this deed the whole world is purged and expiated from all sins, and thus it is set free from death and every evil.

All the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer. Not only my sins and yours, but the sins of the entire world, past, present, and future, attack Him, try to damn Him, and do in fact damn Him. He has and bears all the sins of all men in His body—not in the sense that He has committed them but in the sense that He took these sins, committed by us, upon His own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood.

Christ was not only found among sinners; but of His own free will and by the will of the Father He wanted to be an associate of sinners, having assumed the flesh and blood of those who were sinners and thieves and who were immersed in all sorts of sin.

Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or may commit in the future, they are as much Christ's own as if He Himself had committed them. In short, our sin must be Christ's own sin, or we perish eternally.

So the sin of the entire world attacks righteousness with the greatest possible impact and fury. What happens? Righteousness is eternal, immortal, and invincible. The outcome is that Jesus redeems the whole of humankind. Jesus is the only way.

Now faith in the Gospel of God is no genie. Faith is no magic and no three wishes and no decision on our part. Faith is absolutely better, because we don't get anything we could come up with. We receive what God knows is better and what God knows we need.

In Jesus' name, Amen.