

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**January 2017**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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Galatians – Chapter 2:15-21  
A Summary of the True Gospel (b)

Today's NT reading is a summary of Paul's Gospel.

(review of last week)

The Gospel Paul preached is clearly the true Gospel, because he received it from Christ Himself. In examining Paul's summary of this Gospel, as found in verses 15-21 of Chapter 2 of the letter to Galatians, there are five points to be emphasised: The three covered last week were,

- the Gospel is a message of 'justification' – how sinners can be 'put right' with a perfectly just God;
- how a man is NOT justified – by works of the law; and
- how a man IS justified – through faith in the finished work of Christ. The double imputation of: our sins to Him; and His perfect righteousness to us.

This week we shall consider the remaining two points.

4. This truth of justification by faith and not a person's works (of the law) can produce some difficulties. As we find in verses 17 to 20.

Surprising that a message that you can be pardoned by God and accepted by God – not on the basis of what you have done, but on the basis of what another has done - can cause difficulties to arise!

The Jews – the Judiazers – of Paul's day said (and many, many people today will say), that such a message is a very dangerous doctrine.

Imagine that! There have been and there are people in the world who say that the Gospel is dangerous.

Why?

They argue like this: If God justifies bad people – if God justifies you not on the basis of anything you've done, but on the basis of what Christ has done. Why shouldn't you go on and do what you please. If God justifies bad people what's the use of being, good? If God justifies you without your doing anything, then why shouldn't you just live as you please? Why not just break God's laws 'willy nilly,' because it doesn't matter if you keep the law or not since the basis is that Christ has kept the law. That's how people argue. It's called *antinomianism*.

But they go further. They say that if justification through faith is true then, it means that a Christian can live as he please, saying to the world, "I'm a Christian!" yet live as he pleases thus making Christ the author and approver and agent of sin. That's what objectors to this truth say, even today.

When Paul hears those sorts of accusations, he says at the end of verse 17, “*Certainly not!*” (or more strongly rendered in the KJV, “*God forbid!*” “If after my justification I still sin. That's not Christ's fault. That's my fault. Only myself to blame. No blame is to be attached to Christ!” In verse 17 Paul is refusing the idea that the man, after justification, is no longer personally responsible. Paul is particularly refusing the idea that Christ is somehow responsible for the sin in believer's lives.

On the other hand he warns, verse 18, that we don't rekindle the idea that law keeping is essential to salvation: <sup>18</sup> *For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.* The Gospel is clearly opposed to the idea that law keeping is necessary for salvation. We don't rebuild that idea. We would be inconsistent and false if we gave people the idea that we must keep God's law to be **saved**. We'd be reacting against what we believe to be true.

So in verses 17 and 18 Paul has a marvellous balance: He's telling us that a Christian doesn't live as he likes – Christ isn't the agent or creator of sin – yet he is also telling us that a Christian doesn't believe that law keeping is essential to salvation.

He then goes on to a truth that is sadly under-preached today.

The truth of 'union with Christ'.

Friends, the two blessings of the New Covenant are:

    a new record in heaven, and

    a new nature on earth.

Everyone who has a new record in heaven has a new nature on earth!

That arises from this fact: that everyone for whom Christ died also died when Christ died. Let's get this clear. It's been sadly under-preached!

Jesus Christ didn't just die for you. You died with Him. His cross was a historic fact. But it's more than that. It's a shared fact. Because of your unity with Christ – in God's plan – Christ's life is reckoned to be yours. Because of your union with Christ in God's plan, Christ's death is reckoned to be yours. And thankfully, so is His resurrection and His ascension and His glorification. The great truth of union with Christ: chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; everything Christ did and accomplished, is reckoned to my account. It's reckoned as if I did it. As if it happened to me! That's what Paul is saying here in verses 19 and 20.

Where he talks in both examples about dying and living. Verse 19, <sup>19</sup> *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.* What does that mean?

The law demanded my death. But the demands of the law have been met.

Because I did die when Christ died – since I am in Christ. So that means

because the demands of the law have been met, the law has nothing more to demand. So I through the law am dead to the law. Finished with it – as a way of getting right with God. Instead I live unto God.

It's the same in verse 20: <sup>20</sup> *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

“When Christ was crucified I am crucified with Him, never-the-less I live. I'm very much here. But the person who's here is not the same person as that unconverted person I was beforehand. When Christ died, I died with Him. But I'm alive in the present. But a different person. One in whom Christ lives.”

That great truth, Paul is stating here: “so here I am living in the flesh.” You can still touch Christians and bump into them – you're still living in the flesh, but the life you're living is not a life depending on works for your acceptance with God, “but I live my life in the faith of the Son of God. The great truth which keeps me going day after day and week after week is that He loved me and gave Himself for me.” So Paul is saying, “I died when Christ died – the old life is over. To talk about going back to living as I did before is just unimaginable!” “The Christ with whom I died and died for me, is also the Christ who is within me. I have new desires; new motives; new aspirations; new hopes. To talk about living as I used to before I was converted, is just so much nonsense.” How could I live in sin, when I know that it was because of my sin that Christ loved me and gave Himself – for me.”

So by this truth of 'union with Christ' Paul answers the difficulties that justification by faith creates.

So far then 4 things: the message of the Gospel is justification; how a man is not justified; how a man is justified; and we have covered the difficulties that this creates.

5. Now in conclusion the fifth point. Looking at the difficulties that this truth of justification avoids. Verse 21. The great truth of justification by faith avoids having a Gospel which has no place in it for the grace of God. And the great truth of justification by faith avoids having a Gospel which has no place in it for the 'Cross of Christ'.

<sup>21</sup> *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

Let's imagine that you could earn your way into favour with God: you 'pull up your socks' that little bit higher; you try that little bit harder; you work and you work again; avoid everything which God forbids; embrace everything which God commands; you come up to the required standard. Into heaven you go. Who gets the glory? You do. It's your work from beginning to end. You've done it all! In such a Gospel there is no place for the grace of God. This then rules it out as a true Gospel. For the Gospel is called, in the Bible: the Gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

The true Gospel tells me that I am lost – irretrievably – in my sin. But God for a reason known only to God, loves me, even though I was a rebel. I'm depraved and polluted, yet He loved me, though He is high and holy. Sent His Son to live

in a way that I could never live. To bear a punishment that if I had to bear I would have to bear it eternally.

I didn't earn in any way the right for Christ to come down and to save me. He came because it was out of desire and love and favour – unmerited favour. To come and do that for me. Before I was born. He bore my sins on His own body on the tree. Was put in the tomb on my behalf. Raised from the dead on my behalf. Presented Himself alive on my behalf and is now in heaven bearing the marks of His agony. On my behalf bearing up my cause there. That's all grace! All God's unmerited kindness and favour. That's the glory of the Gospel. Once you start preaching works or preaching a PLUS you have a gospel without any emphasis on grace.

“This grace, kindness and favour occurred long before I was born”, Paul has said. “I was born a child of Adam and even when I heard the Gospel, I acted spitefully towards it, by neglecting and rejecting it. And the same Christ that gave me my new life gave me His Spirit by which my life was changed. At last I could see to be wise, what I had thought was foolish. I could see to be strong what I thought to be weak. At last I was for, what I was previously against. I was given a new nature. For without this I could never have accepted what Jesus Christ offered me in the Gospel. The same grace that brought me to Christ gave me a new heart. That keeps me in Christ. It's all grace! What a folly is a salvation by works.

They teach in some circle today that if you live well enough you'll be alright. Where is the Gospel in that? Where is the grace of God in that? Where is the glory given to God in that? A gospel without glory.

Only by the great truth of justification by faith alone preached, that we see the grace of God – in its glory – displayed in the Gospel.

And not only this: look at verse 21 again. *for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.* If you can be saved by just doing what has to be done, then Christ's death was a waste of time. There was no point in His coming, if you can be saved just by working hard enough and living to a high enough standard. Why on earth should the Son of God come down and live and die in agony and shame, if I can be saved without that cross. The cross has no meaning except in the context of the great truth of justification by faith. Has no meaning at all.

It is folly to put crosses on Churches – make habits of signs of the Cross – and yet have a message that makes that cross superfluous and redundant. That's what false Gospels do. They say that by coming and partaking of the 'mass' you receive Christ in the 'mass'. And so on and so on. The message given is that what you do and how you react ultimately saves you, implying that there was no need for a substitutional death. There was no need for the 'Lamb of God' to bleed and die.

The glory of the Gospel is that the Cross is central to it. It teaches that without the cross we would all be perishing, lost and without any hope. But in the Cross the punishment was poured out by an angry God upon His innocent Son [In the mystery of the blessed Trinity on Himself, in fact]. In that mysterious way which we can never fathom: God was forsaken of God and banished instead of me. Took what was due to me upon Himself and bore it in full. The Cross is the glory of the Gospel. But if I don't have justification by faith, I don't need to have a Cross!

So Paul keeps the two foundation planks of Christianity: the glory of the Gospel is seen in God's grace; the glory of the Gospel is seen in the supreme display of God's grace – which is the Cross of Christ.

Any other Gospel is man centred. Any other Gospel is Christ degrading. Any other Gospel therefore is no Gospel.

Five points then in Paul's summary of the true Gospel.

- Our greatest need is Justification – to be 'put right with God'. Obtain pardon and acceptance.
- But the way to justification does not lie in oneself.
- The way to justification only lies in Jesus Christ's blood and righteousness.
- The accusation that justified people can just live as they please is false.
- The glory of the Gospel lies in the fact that it points to the grace of God, displayed supremely in the Cross of Christ.

[2360]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

**Galatians – Chapter 3:1-18**

The True Gospel: Justification through Faith (a)

So far in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he has told us two most important things:

- he has shown us, beyond all doubt, that the Gospel he preaches is the real Gospel. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus Christ and it was the Gospel that was approved by the other Apostles. It was most important that Paul should demonstrate that, because false teachers were troubling the Church and they were teaching another Gospel. Basically what they were teaching was Christianity PLUS: to be saved, you must have faith in Christ, plus the Jewish ceremonial law. "You can't be saved," they said, "just by faith in Christ." Paul insists that he preaches the true Gospel not this corrupted one 'which is no Gospel at all'.
- He has also shown to us, what the true Gospel is. It is the message of Justification: you as a sinner are not righteous – only God is. Therefore there is tension, controversy, between you and God. However you may be pardoned all your sins AND you may be accepted as righteous in the sight of God – able to come into the favour and fellowship of God. That is the Gospel. And such justification – the word we use to describe this pardon of sins and acceptance by God – Paul has proved does not come about by any thing you do, hope to do or are. Rather it is because Jesus lived a perfect life on your behalf and Christ died the penalty of the broken law on your behalf. It's by having faith (relying on, trusting in) what Christ has already done that a sinner is justified.

Now in today's passage he's going to bring out four supporting arguments.

The new Christians in Galatia had been persuaded by the false teachers, falsely. So Paul is going to persuade them of the truth, again.

Four supporting arguments which prove that we are justified through faith alone and not by works of the law. If you've fallen into the Galatian heresy, he wants to retrieve you. To bring you back to the truth.

Justification – your acceptance with God – really is done through faith and not by the works of the law:

[Perhaps as you heard the passage read earlier you thought it all sounded rather complicated. And if you read the commentaries you may often find them suggesting that here is Paul, the rabbi, engaging in rabbinic argument, which is not very relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is very sad! Because the religion 'of the world', is that false Galatian religion. Most men and women believe; most world religions believe; and the majority of professing Christian people believe, that they can be accepted by God (or gods) if they try hard enough. If they live well enough. If they reform. If they improve. If they 'pull up their socks. If they ... If they ... This is the fallen human's principal way of creating their own god, which they can control, by their own invention and effort

– it comes most naturally to us all!]

Most men and women believe that acceptance with God is a question of something they do! They just don't understand that acceptance with God is to do with the finished work of Christ. If you can master these four arguments which Paul uses -- this week and next week – maybe you'll be able to use them in your Christian witness. When people are saying to you, "I'll work my own ticket. I'm as good as anybody else. I'll do the best that I can. Maybe God will have me in the end." Then perhaps you may be able to use one or more of these arguments to convince people – those who have been elected by God – that Justification is through faith, not by the works of the law.

1. Verses 1-5. This is an argument from **experience**. What Paul is saying could be paraphrased as follows: "I came to Galatia. I preached to you. You had the truth displayed before you. I publicly paraded before you, 'Jesus Christ as crucified'. I preached a present Christ to you, and I preached Christ in such vivid terms, that it was just as if the crucified Christ was in front of you. Yet that truth which has been so powerfully and plainly put before you, is a truth that you no longer believe? What an act of folly! *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?* You had powerful Gospel preaching but you don't believe it any more. It's like someone has cast a spell over you, they've lead you astray – hypnotised you – to believe something different."

"Let me put a few questions to you," says Paul in verse 2. "You received the Spirit, didn't you? You began the Christian life. How did you receive the Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by obeying the ceremonial law? You men: did you go and get circumcised and that was the moment that you received the Spirit? You women: did you submit to some Jewish ordinance or ceremony and that was the moment the great change took place in your life? Or was it when you heard the Gospel **and believed it**, that the great change took place?"

Let's put that question here this Sunday morning: Some of us just couldn't see the truth of the things of God, but now we do. Some of us, our lives once were noticeably perverse – all our lives were perverse before conversion – but some were noticeably and obviously so! When did the great change come in your life? Did the great change come when you heard a set of rules and decided to obey them? Or did the great change come when you heard the Gospel and fled to Jesus Christ for refuge? You know which it was. Your own experiences tell you that the great change comes not by the works of the law, because though you may make lots of 'new year resolutions', as it were, you never actually keep them. Although you've said that you will 'pull up your socks' a thousand times, you never manage to do it.

But one day the Gospel came to you with power. You heard it. You submitted to it. You came to Christ and your life was changed as a result. That was a proof from **experience**.

Now Paul goes on from verse 3: There are two great alternatives before the human race. You can either say that you're going to get right with God by the



law or going to get right by the Gospel. The law says: you do this. The Gospel says: Christ has done it all! The law says: you must achieve something. The Gospel says: Christ has achieved it all. The law says: I make certain demands upon you, obey them. The Gospel makes certain promises to you and says: **believe them!**

“Now then, if the law couldn't even get you into the spiritual life, the spiritual dimension. Are you foolish enough to think that you can make progress in that spiritual life by way of the law?” <sup>3</sup> *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* This is what Paul says in verse 3. “If rites and ceremonies couldn't even make you a Christian, do you think that rites and ceremonies can make you a better Christian? Are you so foolish?”

Then in verse 4: <sup>4</sup> *Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?* “When you became a Christian you suffered no end of persecution – because Christians do. Don't they? Tomorrow in your normal life, if you tell the people you usually meet that if they live well enough – God will accept them. They will be pleased with your message. But if instead you tell them that however hard they try, they will never please God and therefore they are under His curse. And to be delivered from this they must come as little children and have faith and trust in Christ; call on Him for mercy; and submit to Him for the rest of their lives. You'll be persecuted! The 'fallen' world can't stand that message. It doesn't mind the message that bolsters its pride. But it can't stand the message that says that it must come as a suppliant to an all sufficient Saviour and rest entirely on Him.

As long as the Galatians believed the true Gospel they were persecuted. The moment they stopped believing the true Gospel and went back to 'works', they were no longer persecuted. “Therefore,” says Paul, “was all that persecution you went through a waste of time?” It will be a waste of time if Paul can't win the Galatians back to the truth! They will have gone through all that trouble for nothing.

However, verse 5: <sup>5</sup> *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith.* “God is amongst you in Galatia”. Paul was saying. The Spirit was at work in the Galatian Church and because it was a Church where an Apostle had preached, there were miracles going on in the Galatian Church.<sup>1</sup> “But how is it that the Spirit was at work in such a striking way in the Galatian Church?”, Paul asks, “Is it because you all submit to circumcision and the ceremonial laws or is it because you all **repented and believed the Gospel?**”

So you can see what Paul's first argument is. In simple summary it is that they

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<sup>1</sup> In God's Economy, there are times in the history of His revelation of Himself to fallen mankind, when He uses miracles. The time of Christ on earth and of the Apostles was a notable one. The most significant being the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Lesser miracles performed by Apostles were also of value in circumstances where the written record of this paramount phase of revelation was being determined. Once the 'canon' was available this age of direct miracle ceased. Nothing needed to be added. (Rev 22:18,19) The written Word interpreted by the Spirit, within the regenerated Christian, is the source and sufficiency of all revelation needed now, for Salvation. See Also WCF 1:6, 7. The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation. (Anglican statement),

had all experienced a great deal. But those experiences had become theirs, not through rites and ceremonies, rules and regulations, but those experiences had become theirs by submitting to the Gospel and coming to Christ. In this first argument he is arguing from their own **experience**. To show to them that the true Gospel is one of justification by faith. The true Gospel is not one of justification by works. Similarly, anyone with a real Christian **experience** must be convinced of this. Paul's first argument.

2. Now his second argument. Verse 6-9. An entirely different argument. This time it is from the **history** of Abraham. It's a powerful argument! (Paul uses this same one in Romans.) Here's why: these false teachers were in fact saying, "Alright your Gentiles, but to be saved you must be circumcised and submit to Jewish ceremonies." "To be saved you must become a Jew first,"

"Alright," says Paul, "let's look at the 'father' of the Jewish faith. Was the father of the Jewish faith saved in the way that the false teachers say, or was the father of the Jewish faith saved in the way that I say?"

Let's look at the argument. "Remember Abraham," he says, in verse 6, from Genesis 15 they knew that Abraham was an old man and he was childless. God took him out in the evening, showed him the stars in the heavens. So many, many of them and God said, 'so shall your descendants be'. Such an improbable promise. But a promise none-the-less. **Abraham believed it**. Not because it was probable but because God said it.

We read this in Genesis and Paul quotes the end of it: <sup>6</sup>*just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?*

From that moment God accepted Abraham as righteous in His sight. Not because he had done anything to deserve it. He hadn't. Not because he was circumcised. He wasn't circumcised at this stage. Not because he had submitted to rites and ceremonies. Because they didn't exist at that stage. The 'father' of the Jewish race was justified by faith! He was not saved in the way the Judaisers, the false teachers, said was absolutely essential.

Paul's argument is terrific. "it's no good." he says in verse 7, "It's no good you false teachers saying, that you've got to be a child of Abraham first, before you can be a Christian. Because the true (spiritual) children of Abraham aren't those descended from Abraham genetically. The true children of Abraham are those who have a faith like Abraham's faith."

This is an important point by the way. The term 'Israel' spiritually, doesn't mean those who have descended from Abraham via his God-given son Isaac via his God-chosen son Jacob – who was renamed Israel. (Hence the genetic description: 'Children of Israel' – meaning the racial Jews.) Israel, in God's eyes – that is spiritually – are those people who have the same faith as Abraham had (which includes the 'remnant' of genetic Jews throughout the ages as well as all true Christian believers).

Now verse 8: If the false teachers are right – if they are – then God's promise to Abraham is meaningless. Because look at what the false teachers are saying: “You and you and you and you – whoever you are – you've got to become a Jew first, before you can be saved.” In other words you've got to drop your present nationality and take on a new nationality. If they were right then God's promise in verse 8 was nonsense. Because He says to Abraham, “*In you shall all the nations be blessed.*” Making it plain that the people who would be blessed in Abraham would be people in all different nations, not people all of the same nation. That's Paul's argument.

The blessing that God was promising through Abraham was the one of which we've been speaking: justification.

If you follow Abraham's example, what ever nation you belong to what ever your background may be. If you follow Abraham's example and believe God's promise in His Word, you will enter into the blessings which Abraham received. Because he is the father of the faith.

When God made that promise He wasn't talking national privileges, He was talking, says Paul, of Gospel blessings. So look at verse 9: <sup>9</sup> *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* Who ever you are, if you have faith in Christ, you enter into the same blessings as faithful Abraham entered. Such a great truth!

Powerful argument. Abraham was saved not in the way these Judaisers were teaching. Abraham the father of the Jewish race was saved by justification through faith. True Jews then are not those who are circumcised and adopt Jewish rites. True Jews are those who have Abraham's faith. Say if you like that people must become Jews before they become saved. But to become a spiritual Jew – that is in God's eyes – means to have Abraham's faith. It doesn't mean to have rites and ceremonies.

Once again, Paul has proved that justification is by faith! The truth Paul is preaching is the truth upon which the eternal happiness of every man and woman in the world depends.

[2502]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Next week Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> argument.

Review of part (a).

We continue with arguments 3 and 4:

3. Verses 10-14. Perhaps an argument a little easier than the first two – From experience of being a true Christian; and the history of Abraham – now he argues from the **meaning of Christ's death**.

He's already explained in the previous chapter that if you can be saved by living correctly then, Christ didn't need to die. True! If the man next to you tomorrow, can be saved by 'trying hard enough', then Christ didn't need to die. There was no necessity for any cross! So Paul, in verses 10-14, talks about the meaning of the cross.

Verse 10. Let's say that you're hoping to get right with God by 'law keeping'. Very well then. How much of the 'law' have you got to keep? **All of it!** And how often are you to keep all the law? **All the time!** If you're going to be accepted by God on the basis of 'law keeping', you've got to keep all the law all the time! And if you don't you are cursed! God, says so. *Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.* (v 10 b) So says, God, the living God – the God with whom I have to do – unless I am perfect I am cursed. And that means, at once, that we are all cursed.

Law keeping is 'out'. A no entry: as far as the way to salvation is concerned. None of us is perfect. One only was perfect. Look at verse 11: Indeed the very Old Testament, to which the Jadaisers appealed, teaches: not justification by works, but justification by faith. We have that great word in Habakkuk, chapter 2 verse 4. The great word which Paul quotes here, which turned Luther's life right round. *"The righteous shall live ..."*. By keeping the 10 Commandments? No. By keeping the Ceremonial Law? No. How will a man be just in the sight of God? How will a man live in the sight of God? *"The righteous shall live by **faith**"*. Even the Old Testament teaches it! In addition there is no element of faith in law keeping, says Paul in verse 12: <sup>12</sup> *But the law is not of faith, ...*. It talks about "doing" not "believing". *"The one who does them shall live by them."* And you haven't done them, so you can't live by them. Therefore you are under the curse!

"Every one of us is cursed in the sight of God," says Paul. There's no hope for us we are unutterably damned. There's no escape. We can't work our way out of it. Even if we improve now, we'll never be good enough.

It's all up for us. We're lost. We're condemned.

But. Christ has redeemed us. From the curse of the law. His being made a curse for us. That's the Gospel. I deserve the penalty: God's curse. There was One who didn't deserve a penalty. The penalty that should fall on me, has fallen on Him. Just like those who were cursed by God in the Old Testament, were tied to a stake or hung from a tree, the One who came under God's malediction, who came under God's curse. Nailed on a cross. Hung on a tree. Publicly displayed as someone under the curse of God. Which is why He cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It was a substitution. The Jews stumble at the 'cross'. They see Jesus on the cross in the place, the cursed place, of being hung on a tree. They cry, "Jesus is accursed!" And Jesus was accursed, in the sight of God at that moment He was the worse thief and the worst pervert and the worst sinner and the worst liar in the world. All the judgement that should come upon liars and thieves and sinners fell upon Him. That it might not fall upon them.

It was a Divine Substitution. Christ dying for His people. That's what Paul is stressing when he talks about justification by faith. So the blessing on Abraham – the receiving of the Spirit and acceptance in the sight of God – flows to the Gentiles. Not on the basis of their way of living but through Jesus Christ. That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, which is what he says, in verse 14: *<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

So we must recognise: there are two destinies. Those who are under the curse of God; and those who are under the blessing of God. No in-between ground. There are two roads: those who walk the road of law keeping; and those who walk the road of faith in Christ. One road leads to one destiny and the other road to the other destiny. Those who think that the road to law keeping leads to the destiny of blessing are mistaken! The road of self-justification by ones own effort always leads to God's curse. Because you can't keep, and you haven't kept, God's Law. Only the road of faith in Christ which leads to the 'blessing of Abraham flowing to the Gentiles'.

So Paul has used a third argument to show to us that justification is by faith, not by the works of the law.

4. So now we come to the 4<sup>th</sup> supporting argument that Paul uses. (All these arguments can be used with unbelievers today. If people say to you today that they, "Will win their way into favour with God." Talk to them about the cross. Parade Jesus crucified before them and ask them why did Christ have to die, if their own way of living, without reference to Christ, can win them into the favour of God!)

Even this persuading argument should be kept in our armoury – perhaps for the very legalistic enquirer.

Verses 15-18 is an argument from the relation of the 'law' to the 'promise'. It can be complicated so let's use a simple analogy: Suppose a good friend of yours dies. You go to hear the will read. It's proved to be his will and as it is read (your

name is John Smith for the purpose of the example) it says, "And I give without any condition to my friend John Smith the sum of \$50,000." So, when you have recovered, you go to the executor – the person who distributes the bequests – and you say, "I'm John Smith, here's my birth certificate and passport for identification. Please may I have the \$50,000 promised to me."

The executor says, "Yes, you may have the \$50,000, when you're 85; provided you've been of good behaviour; and been resident at Rottnest for six years."

You reply, "It didn't say anything about that in the will." "In the will it said, 'without condition to my friend, John Smith, \$50,000,' but now you're adding conditions! Which weren't there in the original will. How can you impose conditions that weren't in the original promise? I want my \$50,000 simply on the basis that they were promised to me. You can not add anything extra. Any PLUS."

That's Paul's illustration (leaving out the specifics like Rottnest).

This is how Paul actually puts it: In verse 15 he says, "let me use a little illustration: If a man makes a will the terms of that will are unalterable. You can't add to the will or take away. The will stands as it is written." If that's true of a man's will how much more so is it of God's?

Now verse 16: God made a promise to Abraham and his seed (descendent, ESV) – singular. That is through a certain descendent, all the Nations would be blessed. (The promise wasn't through his seeds – Paul believed in the verbal inspiration of Scripture – but a seed. That seed being Christ!) The promise in God's covenant was: Through Christ every Nation will be blessed. Only through Christ.

Now verse 17: There was the promise. No strings attached. No conditions attached. NO LAWS TO OBEY. No rites to observe. No conditions to fulfil. There was the promise:

"Abraham I will give you a seed and that seed, that Christ, will bless every Nation.

That being so, you can't add to God's will and testament. You can't say that a law, which came 430 years later must be a condition for that blessing to flow to the Gentiles. That's in fact what the Judaisers were saying. They were saying, "You've got to have faith in Christ, but you also have to submit to the law – ceremonial law – which was given 430 years later. God's law promises an inheritance, but they were adding extra conditions. How can conditions given 430 years later modify the promise of God?"

The blessing of Abraham flows to all Nations through Christ alone. And if a person comes to Christ, he enters into the blessing of Abraham. You can't say the blessing of Abraham flows to all Nations of the earth through Christ PLUS – the ceremonial law. When these laws were given 430 years later.

So, verse 18, Paul comes to the conclusion that the condition that the false teacher put on the new converts of law keeping was not essential, because it was not part of the original promise. The original promise is that every sinner who puts his trust in Christ, will enter into the blessings of Abraham. The original promise: all who trust in Christ crucified for salvation. They will have salvation without their merit and without their good works. They will receive the blessing of Abraham.

The blessing flows to the world. All the world! Through the seed, who is Christ. Not through the seed PLUS. So where ever there is faith in Christ – pure and simple – there is salvation. It is an error to add any PLUS at all.

So Paul has given four arguments that this soul saving truth is: justification is from faith in the finished work of Christ with no PLUS. Nothing else is required.

Christian **experience** denies the PLUS; the **history** of Abraham denies the PLUS; the **cross** denies the PLUS; and the relation of the law to the **promise** denies the PLUS.

You cannot preach a PLUS. You cannot tolerate it. You cannot entertain it. The preaching of any PLUS is a departure from the truth.

What about us? On what do you rely this morning for your acceptance by God? Your works? False hopes – you're under God's curse. Do you rely even on your faith? That's a false hope also. Faith can't save you. It's Christ who saves. What Christ does becomes mine through faith. But it's not my having faith which is the basis of my acceptance with God. Or do you rely on your faith in Christ PLUS the standard of Christian living, which you're able to maintain? All those are false gospels.

The true Gospel is that sinners are unreservedly pardoned by God on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done and on the basis of that alone. The great Gospel promise that makes the Gospel a free offer to all the world is that 'he that believeth on Him', shall not be put to shame.

[1912]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

**Delivered Sunday 22 January 2017**

*Galatians – Chapter 3:19 – 4:7 (a)*  
The Place of the Law in Making Us Sons

The previous two Sermons on Galatians covered Paul's four points about the true Gospel. Four arguments we can use to prove that the true Gospel is justification through faith in the finished work of Christ and not by our works (of the law). These four arguments of Paul can be remembered from the four words: Experience, history, cross, and promise. [expand ?]

Today as we move on we will use three words: history, experience, and illustration.

Looking first at verses 19-22: Remember then the word **history**.

Then (next week) for verses 23 to the end of the Chapter: the word **experience**.

Finally Chapter 4: 1-7: the word **illustration**.

This is how it all fits together: Paul has been explaining what the true Gospel is. The true Gospel is a message of justification. Which is a word taken out of the law court. If you go to court and you're found guilty, you have condemnation – declared guilty. But the very opposite of that is justification – you're declared not guilty. You're declared righteous.

It is possible for a sinner to be pardoned all his sins and acquitted of them and be received into favour with God. And of course if you're received into favour with God, you're received into fellowship with God. It's possible – that's what the Gospel is about.

How can I be just in the sight of God? How can I be accepted by God? That's the question the Gospel answers.

Some people say you must earn your way into the favour of God. They believe that justification is something YOU must DO. But the Gospel, says, "No".

God does not demand of you: that you live a righteous life, **to be saved**. Somebody else has lived it. God does not demand of you that you bear the punishment of your own sins. Somebody else has borne them.

God demands of you that you **know** that truth, that you **believe** that truth and that you **'rest'** (rely on, trust in) that truth. So I 'rest' upon a life which I did not live. I have my faith in a death which I did not die. It's because another lived righteously where I failed. It's because another died when I should die. I believe He did it for me and I 'rest' upon it. It's by that basis – what Christ did – that I am received into fellowship with God.

Paul has proved that point and also that any other teaching is 'false' teaching. He's illustrated that point, pressing it on the hearts and consciences of the Galatians. In case they believe that there is any other message. He preaches the only valid Gospel: that I can be received by a holy God – in whom there is no wrong – but there is wrong in me. Only through the person and work of Christ.

Now having told us that, proved, underlined, stressed and pressed it upon us, Paul now takes us into the realm of **history**. Verse 19-22.



When some people hear the truth of the Gospel – the truth of justification – they have a question: “If I'm not saved by keeping God's law, why did God give that law?” A fair enough question! “Paul you've been telling us that I am saved by casting everything on Christ. There's no place for the law in your Gospel.”

So what place does the law have? After all God did give His law. And if He didn't give His law to save us, why then did He give His law? That's the question we need to answer this Sunday morning. You're not saved by keeping the 10 Commandments. So why did God give them? People were teaching in the Galatian church that you need faith in Christ PLUS the law. You needed faith in Christ PLUS the old ceremonies, and rites and ordinances. If we're not saved by those things why did God give them? Why did God speak from Sinai?

Paul has his answer ready and if you look at verse 19 you will see the very question: <sup>19</sup>*Why then the law?* Why did God give the law? And here is his answer: *It was added because of transgressions, ...* . What's that mean?

God gave the law, not to give you salvation, but to show to you your need for salvation. God gave the law to convince you that you need to be saved. The coming of the law into the world made men and women realise that they really were in open revolt against God. It became clear to them that the offences they were committing were transgressions – legal offences.

For example: Here is a man who uses God's word like an ordinary word. He doesn't think anything of it. It's wrong, but he's only vaguely conscious of it being so. Then he hears the third commandment: “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain ...*” Exodus 20:7 At once he's confronted with a black and white command. He knows that what he's been doing for months and years is plainly wrong. God has spoken out against it. The man is guilty and he will be held to account for it. The thing that he regarded very lightly, is now known by him to be a legal offence. It's plain to him now that he really is a sinner. It's plain to him now that he is in open revolt against the will of God. That's why God gave the law: to make his condition clear to him.

Or, take a man whose outward life is everything you could want it to be. But in his heart he wants what that person up the road has got. The person up the road has just bought the latest .... what ever your really want! He has got his eye on it. He wants it for himself. He wishes it was his. He's not satisfied with his lot any more. He wants what the other person has got.

When you listen to that man speak it sounds alright. His life appears to be alright. And he doesn't think that there is anything particularly wrong with wanting what the next person has. But then God's law comes! It says: <sup>17</sup> “*You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.*” Anything that is your neighbours! Anything. The person suddenly realises that although they appear to be OK in the sight of others, in the sight of God their heart is wrong and they are in open revolt against God. The law convinces them of their standing with God. That's why the law was given. So says Paul in verse 19: *It was*

*added because of transgressions, .*

When the law was given it was clear, from the way the law was given, that the law was never intended to save us. When God promised that Abraham would have a descendant, who would be a saviour, God spoke directly to Abraham. No intermediaries! But when God gave the law we note from verses 19 & 20 that God did it like this: God gave the law through angels. The angels represented God. And the people received the law through Moses. So God's intermediary met the people's intermediary and that's how the law was given. So when the people actually got the law of God, they got it third-hand. They didn't get it directly as Abraham did. So it is plain, from the way the law was given, that the law is inferior to the promise.

The promise given to Abraham was that there should be a saviour, but when the law was given it was given in an inferior way. So that law was not a way of salvation. This is what Paul is saying.

So God gave the law in an inferior way to convince you of your sin. So when, at last, the saviour came He would come to people who were convinced of sin. But this then raises another problem which Paul anticipates in verse 21 & 22, as he continues this survey of history: salvation was promised by the 'seed', that's the descendent of Abraham we mentioned last week. Yet salvation appears to be offered by the law, because (Leviticus 18:5 and elsewhere) *if a person does them, he shall live by them*.

It appears that there are two ways of salvation offered to mankind. That's the way it looks. If there are two ways of salvation obviously they are in open conflict with each other. So that raises the question of verse 21. Is the law then against the promises of God? Is there conflict between the promise of a saviour and the law? No! *Certainly not!* Is the way the ESV translates Paul's answer. [Absolutely not (NIV); and more emphatically, God forbid (KJV)]

In verse 21, Paul goes on to tell us that the law could never bring life. It is true what God said when the law was given: *if a person does them, he shall live by them*. Here is a personal test: Keep a notebook for every day next week, of every time you're conscious of breaking any of the 10 Commandments. You'll have quite a full notebook by next Sunday. And they will only be the occasions that your conscious, that you've broken the ten Commandments. It's quite plain that the law is not a way of salvation, because nobody can keep the law. Although the law in theory does promise life, in fact, there is no life through the law. If the law were a viable means of salvation then there would be conflict between the law and Gospel promises. However since the law is not a viable way of salvation there is no conflict.

All the law does (verse 22) is to imprison everything under sin. All the ten Commandments does for you is bring you into condemnation. It 'shuts you up' – is the Greek language of verse 22 -- in the prison house of condemnation, [NIV translates as: *the whole world is a prisoner of sin*]

Not convinced? Start to think through the 10 Commandments. Right at the very first,

God says, “*You shall have no other gods before me. ...*” Has there ever been, even for a minute, something more important to you than God? If so, you can't even get past the first Commandment. What about the worship of anything other than God! The second Commandment. Have you ever ascribed 'worth' to anything in addition to God? And so on. As you survey the 10 Commandments it becomes more and more plain that you're condemned. Each one of them is another bolt in the prison of your condemnation. It's another 'shutter' which shuts you up in the place of damnation. Each commandment makes you more and more guilty. No matter how well you live in the future, you can never get saved by the way of the law. That's why the law was given!

<sup>22</sup> *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

Here's a person 'shut up' in prison, realising that however hard he tries he never can be saved by keeping the law. If he is to be saved somebody must come from outside the prison (the law). He can never save himself. So somebody else must save him. The effect of the law on a person is to make that person look for a saviour. That's why the law was given: to make sure that you know you're a sinner. To make sure that you start looking for a saviour.

This then is what we have called **history**. History isn't a meaningless jumble. Modern philosophy could cause you to believe that things happen without any direction or purpose. But in God's history there is meaning in the order of events. God is bringing something to pass. God is working out a purpose. Paul looks at Abraham, at Moses and at Christ. Two thousand years of history. A pagan mind could never see that there was any connection. The significance of the order of a promise given to Abraham; a law given to Moses; and the coming of Christ. God is bringing to pass something meaningful in His history. This is a great lesson to learn.

But there is another lesson. Paul has shown us here the relation of the law to the Gospel. The law condemns you. The Gospel saves you.

So there is a distinction between them. But there is also a connection. The law shows you that you are a sinner. The Gospel promises salvation for sinners, through Jesus Christ. So while there is a distinction between the law and the Gospel, there is also a connection.

Therefore there is a harmony. Once you get hold of that you'll be able to speak about the Gospel to others. But the moment you forget that, you'll be a 'washout' as a Christian witness. Why do men and women not want to come to Christ? They don't see the need. Why don't they see their need? Because Christians have 'soft pedalled' on sin. But when you wound people with God's law, then they start looking for healing. When you bring them to death, by god's law, then they start longing for spiritual life. When you humble them with God's law, then they long to be raised out of that condition. When you show them that God's law makes it a certainty that they're hell-bound, they start looking for a way to be heaven-bound.

The moment you stop preaching the law, you've lost the power to preach the Gospel.

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

**Delivered Sunday 29 January 2017**

Galatians – Chapter 3:19 – 4:7 (b)  
The Place of the Law in Making Us Sons

(Review of last week)

So we have considered Paul's lesson, under the heading of **history**

Now verses 23 -29, where the keyword is **experience**.

Paul has shown that a Saviour is promised, after that comes the law and the law keeps us imprisoned until the Saviour comes. But now Paul shows that that is not just a fact of history but is a fact of Christian experience.

Everybody here this morning is either captive to the law and awaiting the fulfilment of the promise of a Saviour for yourself, or you're delivered from the condemnation of the law because you've inherited the promise of a Saviour.

Everybody here this morning is either under law or in Christ. You're either a person who's trying to get right with God by keeping the law or a person 'resting' on Christ. You're either one or the other!

God's will for men and women is that they should go from one to the other, in that order. It's not God's will that any come to Christ without first coming under the law. You can't come to Christ, without coming under the law first because you would see no need of Him.

Equally it's not God's will that any should continue to abide under the law. Trying to get right with God by works and things that you can do, because that's not the way. God's rule for sinners is that they first be wounded by the law, then healed by Christ. That they first be shut up in the 'prison house' of the law and then released by Christ. That you should go through stage 1: law and stage 2: salvation.

True Christian **experience** goes through both of those stages. So let's see how Paul describes true Christian experience:

Verse 23. <sup>23</sup> *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.* The Greek verbs there are very interesting. The word translated as – held captive – means protected by guards. Then the word translated as – imprisoned – means to be restricted, locked in a cell, shut up in. So here is a picture of a person who is locked in a cell; guards are going past the door and he can't escape. Actually in a condemned cell – he's condemned to die! That's where the law puts you, when you hear the 10 Commandments, you know that you are

condemned to die and you can do nothing about it.

God puts you in that condemned cell – not that you should be condemned – but that you should see that law keeping is no way to salvation. God puts you there so that you will be ready to embrace Jesus Christ, when you hear Him offered to you in the Gospel. Is that your experience this morning? That you became aware, from what you heard of God's word, that you were condemned. In that situation you realised that you could never save yourself, but if you stayed where you were you would go to the gallows of God's justice. Because you were in that situation: you longed for a Saviour.

That's one picture Paul uses. Now look at verse 24:

Young men and boys, if they had lived in the time of Paul, would have had a Paidagogos. Some would, any way. Sufficient, the knowledge of this practice, for Paul's original audience, to see the aptness of his use of the word here.

Fathers didn't have a lot to do with their sons at home. Instead there would have been a very strict slave, in charge of you until the 'age of majority' (18 or 21, even). Very strict. He would be responsible for getting you up in the morning; making sure you got to school; bringing you home from school – to make sure you got safely home. If you misbehaved – didn't pay attention in class for example – he carried a rod, with which he would beat you on your back. He was extremely harsh. Even to the point of cruelty. It was his responsibility to make sure you didn't misbehave. Not even for a moment. Until you were a grown man. He was a Paidagogos (pedagogos). Perhaps not found so much today?

Paul uses that picture. He says that the 10 Commandments are like a Paidagogos. [translated not as clearly as: 'guardian', ESV; 'put in charge to lead us', NIV; 'schoolmaster' KJV] Every time you did something wrong he would punish you. It hurt! Every time the boy felt that rod on his back, he longed for the day when he would be 18 or 21. The more this happened the more he longed for when he would be grown up an rid of this paidagogos. That's what the law is for.

When you hear God's law and you say a wrong word: God's law strikes your conscience. You think a wrong thought: God's law strikes your conscience. It pains you. It hurts you. It punishes you for your misdeeds and it promised you that worse punishment is to come. Therefore it makes you long for a period when you'll be free of that. And we are free of that when we come to Christ. The law isn't a way of putting us right with God. It makes us long for another way by which we may be put right with God. That is the way of being justified by faith.

That's the teaching of verse 23 & 24. It's the first stage of experience that every Christian must go through. God gave you the law to prepare you for Christ. Only Christ can deliver you from the law's penalty: because He bore that penalty. Only Christ can deliver you from the pain of the law: because He brings you into the promised inheritance. [As a Greek heir would inherit on reaching his majority]

Every Christ then must go through the stage of the law. In an earlier age it was

called 'the law work' Then the Christian comes into stage 2. And it so different. Verses 25 -29.

When we have faith. What a difference there is. Nothing is the same now. The situation is completely different. The days of the old paidagogos are over. Everything has changed. That is why it says in verse 25:<sup>25</sup> *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian*, [the paidagogos]. In verse 26 he talks about being '*in Christ Jesus*'. In verse 27: '*baptised into Christ*'. (Not that baptism saves you: that's unthinkable in the context of this letter which is refuting salvation by ones effort, but because baptism is the expression of faith in Christ, it's how faith in Christ is shown.)

Look what he tells us in verse 26 and 27: "You're now God's son! Accepted by God. Not cringing in front of the law. No longer fearing God. No longer dreading God. Forgiven by God. You're not a prisoner in the condemned cell waiting for execution, nor are you a boy under a strict tutor. But instead you're a person who enjoys the status of grown up sons. You have entered into privileges and an inheritance which was promised to you. You're free from all those former things."

When a lad grew up in the Roman world, there was a day when he was given his *toga verilis*. A special clothing that showed that he was a man with the rights of citizenship in that kingdom.

When we come to Christ we put on Christ (our *toga verilis*, as it were). As in verse 27, we're like lads who are finished with the strict supervision and we've entered into the promised inheritance. And they and we are free, from those pains and troubles which we had before. We're 'grown ups'. Sons.

"No only,so," says Paul, in verse 28 & 29, but we don't only have God as our Father, but we belong to one another as Christian siblings. We enjoy a oneness of family life with each other. Yes, there are distinctions between us: of race, gender etc. They exist, but they don't matter. There are distinctions of rank – not as much these days – still they don't matter. Paul is making plain that such distinctions are not a bar to fellowship. Not a bar to acceptance. Not a bar to Christian affection. We belong to each other. We are together one with Jesus Christ. There is a unity amongst us. Christ is the 'head' of the body. We are the several members of it. We belong not only to God but to each other. And still not only this but to the historic succession of believers – past present and future. Abraham believed: verse 29 – if you have the same faith as Abraham we are Abraham's true descendants and we are the heirs of what was promised to Abraham.

What a radical thing Christian conversion is! If you're converted your related to God; you're related to each other; and if you're a believer your related to the believers in the long centuries of the past – right back to Abraham and beyond.

There is a height in Christian **experience**, which extends up to God. There's a breadth in Christian experience which embraces every other true believer. There's a length in Christian experience: I'm joined to the succession of believers.

Christian conversion is as radical as that! Very different from cringing before the law, realising that I'm condemned and that I can never get right with God that way. Right is still right. **We still love the law and in gratitude to Christ, live it**, but we don't rest on the law to save us. We 'rest' upon Christ.

[1624]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Next week we will look at **illustration**.

Appendix:

### The 3 (+1) Uses of the Law.<sup>2</sup>

In this, the 'age to come' – the New Covenant – there remains 3 uses of the Law. (see p1988, *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* for a description of the 'age to come')

It is clear from Galatians that the Law is not a way of earning salvation, since although it is theoretically promised that we may 'live by it', in humankind's 'fallen state', no natural human can satisfy its requirements and receive that 'life'.

However the Law (primarily the 'moral law') retains 3 very important and necessary functions:

1. It provides protective custody while we await the call of the Spirit, during which time we come to realise that we are gross sinners in need of a Saviour. The law convicts us of our sin. From which we fly to Christ for salvation.
2. Once we are in the state of salvation, by the application, through faith, of the righteousness and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ from which we wait the promised outcome on the last day – glorification and complete communion with God – the law – being a reflection of God's character – guides us to know God's will for our reborn lives. Where we, in the newness of life, by being 'in Christ' will, by the Spirit, do Christ's works in the world. Reflecting God's character which is love.
3. As part of general grace – which falls on the unjust and the just, just as the gentle rain from heaven – the law restrains society against the excesses that human nature would otherwise inflict on us all.

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<sup>2</sup> The Three Uses of the Law p937 *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*; Psalm 119:33-40

In the pre incarnation period, the ceremonial laws (now superseded) were the means by which the 'chosen people' were to anticipate, in the 'fullness of time', the realisation of the promise to Abraham through the life, death resurrection and ascension of Christ (the “seed”).