

GALATIANS

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel is Received by Faith - Galatians 3:1-14

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Warm-Up

1. What's something that is great just as it is, but people always seem to want to add unnecessary extras to?

Read Galatians 3:1-6

2. In verse 1, why is Paul so shocked and frustrated with the Galatians? What have they lost sight of?
3. Paul says that Christ was "publicly portrayed as crucified" before their eyes. What does this tell us about the place of the cross in Paul's preaching?
4. Look at Paul's questions in verses 2–5. What evidence from the Galatians' own experience does Paul use to show that they began the Christian life by faith rather than works of the law?
5. What do you think it looks like for a Christian to have "begun by the Spirit" but then try to be "perfected by the flesh" (v. 3)?
6. We might not be tempted to adopt Jewish law observance in the same way as the Galatians. What are some things Christians today can be tempted to add to Jesus in order to feel accepted, secure, righteous or complete?

Read Galatians 3:6-14

7. According to verse 6, why was Abraham counted as righteous before God? Read Genesis 15:1–6 if you have time.
8. Why is Abraham such an important example for Paul's argument? In particular, why does it matter that Abraham lived centuries before the law was given through Moses?
9. How should knowing that God's rescue plan stretches all the way back to Abraham give us greater confidence in the gospel?
10. What happens to someone who relies on works of the law according to verses 10–12? Why can't obedience to the law make us right with God?
11. Verse 11 quotes Habakkuk: "The righteous shall live by faith." What is the difference between trusting Christ and trusting our own obedience to make us right with God?
12. What does Paul mean when he says in verse 13 that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"? What does this teach us about what Jesus accomplished on the cross?
13. According to verse 14, what blessings do we receive because Christ has redeemed us? How are Abraham, Jesus, the blessing of God and the promised Spirit connected?
14. How does Galatians 3:1–14 call you to enjoy the freedom of simply receiving God's grace through faith in Christ?

PRAY: *Loving Lord, we thank you that Christ took the curse that we deserved because of our sin and rebellion. Keep us reveling in your grace and our eyes fixed on Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: The Gospel is Received by Faith

PASSAGE: Galatians 3:1-14

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The way to be a part of God's family and to receive the Spirit is through Faith in Christ.

AIM: For people to remember the freedom that we have in Christ and his grace.

STRUCTURE:

- 1-6 - Don't Move On from Faith
- 7-9 - Remember Abraham's Faith
- 10-14 - Receive the Gift by Faith

- You complete fools! You utter donkeys! People of St John's - What do you think you're doing? Who do you think you are?
- Are you awake yet? Listening up??
- Well - good.

- I hope that I never have to preach like this here at St John's - but for Paul writing to the Galatians it was completely necessary because the situation was dire.
- The Galatians were moving on from Jesus. They were taking their eyes off of him, and off of the cross and instead, being taken captive by other things.
- And so Paul urges them, pleads with them, to remember that we are saved by faith through Christ - not through law works.
- In Chapter 3 - Paul begins his defence of the gospel right through to mid chapter 5.
- And in vv1-14, he makes it completely clear that the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is received by faith...not by works.
- And this is to us here today.
- He urges us to:
 - Don't move on from Faith
 - Remember Abraham's Faith
 - Receive the Gift by Faith

- **Don't Move On from Faith**
- *I wonder - what makes Cricket cricket?*
 - *The ball? The pitch? The bats? The player? It's probably all the above!*
 - *But if you add extra stuff on - if you make the ball a bouncy ball, or add on a rule where you can't get out, if you add on bonus points for hopping one legged down the pitch (oh no, I'm giving TV executives ideas!) It's just not cricket!*
 - *Now may say that the game has to innovate with the times to be relevant, but call me a grumpy old bloke - I'm not one of those people.*
 - *Test Cricket and 50-over cricket is cricket. Don't move on from it@*
- *Or what makes a Pizza a Pizza?*
 - *If you go to Italy, they'd say the glutenous base, the tomato sauce, a bit of fleur de latte cheese, some basil, cooked in a wood-fire oven - that's a pizza!*
 - *As soon as you add pineapple, chicken, prawns, anchovies - or so much topping that you can't see the base anymore - it's just not pizza!!*
- But what makes a Christian a Christian?
- Well according to Paul in vv1-6 - it's someone who doesn't move on from faith in Christ.
- Someone who remains faithful to Christ - because the one who gets distracted, is a fool.
- V1 "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified."
- Paul is certainly not pulling his punches here. He is laying it on thick.
- He calls the Galatians complete donkeys. Complete fools - because they have been captivated by something else other than Christ.
- They have been bewitched! Enchanted!
 - The greek word here is only used here in the whole of the New Testament.
 - It means to exert an evil influence through the eye.

- Someone has put an evil influence before their eyes, and they have been captivated by it!
- Someone has presented a different vision, a different gospel, a perverse and foolish idea to them, and they have taken the bait!
- Even though - it was before their eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.
- Can you see the word play that Paul is using here?
 - They've been captivated by evil through the eye, even though they have seen before their eyes Christ crucified portrayed!
- Paul is really saying here - you guys and girls should know better! You've already seen and known the truth, but you've forgotten and have been led astray!
- Now - the galatians weren't actually there at the crucifixion of Jesus so what is Paul talking about?
- Well, he's reminding them that they have heard quite clearly, and in no uncertain terms, in an open declaration, the truth of the cross of Christ.
- In Paul's preaching, and other faithful evangelists I'm sure, Paul has openly declared the truth of the cross of Christ so clearly that they could say that they have seen it.
- They have seen the grace of Jesus. The mercy of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the self-sacrifice of Jesus, the humility of Jesus, the victory of Jesus, the triumph of Jesus over the grave! But their eyes have been taken off Jesus.
- And they have had their eyes put on the works of the law.
- Paul gets them to have a good hard think about what they have done through a set of rhetorical questions.
- He is urging them to remember that they first came to Christ and received the spirit through faith - so don't try and top it up by doing extra stuff like the Law Works!
- V2 "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"
- The problem the Galatians had - is that they were trying to move on from faith to something else. They were trying to "Top up" their faith with law works
- The word for **perfected** in V3 has the sense of bringing something to completion and to fullness.
- They were being led to believe that faith wasn't enough for them and so they needed to bring it to completion through the flesh, or through fleshly law-following, or fleshly good deeds.
- Some commentators have suggested that Paul could also be referring to circumcision, the cutting of the flesh!
- For them - Grace wasn't enough!
- Paul Continues V4
- "Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 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"
 - This reference to suffering is probably a reference to persecution. Moving from paganism to following one God risked political and social ostracism. Or being a Gentile believer risked persecution because they didn't enjoy the religious freedom given to the Jews.
- But Paul is saying here - is that suffering all pointless now that you're turning to Jewish-looking law works?
- Are those miracles and other works of the Spirit - did they come through faith or law following? Answer - they came by faith.
- So then - Paul is astounded that they have moved on from faith in Christ.
- They have overcomplicated things, muddled the waters, obscured the truth, by taking on Jewish practices and believing that Christ isn't enough
- So friends - is faith in Christ enough for you?
- Here at St John's I hope and pray and believe that Jesus Christ is being publicly as crucified for the forgiveness of sins - and we will do week by week for decades and centuries to come!
- Because we need the constant reminder that God's grace is sufficient. We don't need anything else to complete our faith or complete our lives!
- Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith - no one and nothing else is!
- And yet, our culture screams at us, tries to bewitch us, tries to lure us in, and tries to take our eyes off of Jesus....culture tries to say that Jesus isn't enough.
- We get messages day in and day out that we need something more to complete us:

- That we need Jesus plus a house; Jesus plus a relationship; Jesus plus our freedom of sexuality, Jesus plus our career; Jesus plus...whatever!
- Don't get fooled! Christ is enough!
- Our internal doubts can cause us to think:
 - That I'm not praying enough, reading enough, serving enough, giving enough - but that line of thinking is just trying to perfect ourselves through the flesh instead of being perfected by Christ's death for us!
 - Don't get fooled! Christ is enough!
- One of the sadnesses that I have with some churches is that they have become so distracted with social justice issues and other agendas, that they have forgotten Christ! They have taken Christ out of Christianity!
 - Don't get fooled! Don't get bewitched! Christ is enough!
 - Don't move on from Faith in Christ.
- But remember Jesus and remember Abraham's faith.
- **Remember Abraham's Faith**
- Now this is a masterstroke on Paul's part. Because the Judaisers loved the fact that they were following the Law given to Moses.
- But here, Paul appeals to Abraham who came 430 years before Moses!
- If you were with us last term, we looked at the story of Abraham.
- We saw that the great patriarch of the faith was far from perfect - and yet God was still faithful to his promises. We saw that God is the covenant and promise making and keeping God who we can trust in.
- And you might remember that in Genesis 15, even at the ripe old age of 90, Abraham was promised a Son, and Abraham believed God - and it was counted to him as righteousness. He was credited with Righteousness - that is, he was justified, and declared not-guilty because of his faith.
- Abraham was Justified by faith!
 - Not by his good deeds and certainly not by law following (because the law wasn't given yet) and not by his moral upstanding (which as we saw wasn't evident)
 - But because of his faith in the Lord. Which then led to great faith-actions.
- And so it is with everyone else who has faith in the Lord.
- And in fact anyone who believes in the Lord becomes a son or daughter of Abraham by faith! Doesn't matter if they are Jew or Gentile.
- V7 "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, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."
- In sense, Paul is saying here to those judaisers who boasted in being sons and daughters of Abraham
 - *You think you're so cool, being a jew and not a gentile, you think you've got it all sorted - but guess what champ - Even to Abraham it was promised that all nations (even the gentiles) would be blessed in Genesis 12!*
- And he's saying to the gentile believers:
 - Don't be swayed - because this was all according to God's great plan and rescue mission launched thousands of years ago through Abraham.
 - Don't panic! You're already part of Abraham's family by faith - not by circumcision or by following the Law!
 - Just receive the gift by Faith
- **Receive the Gift by Faith**
- *Once at an Easter chapel service at school, I remember the speaker trying to demonstrate the point that Jesus' resurrection seals the deal. That cheque is valid and able to be cashed in in a sense. All the promises are valid.*
- *To do this, he wrote out a cheque for \$20 to cash, and gave it to a random kid and told him that if he went to the bank, he could bank it and it would all go through!*
- *But there was a problem - the kid didn't want the cheque! He didn't want the gift! He didn't want the money!*
- *So the speaker is there trying to give this kid this money, and the kid is embarrassed and refuses to take it!!*
- Is anyone else like this with gifts? Anyone else feel a bit awkward when receiving gifts? Thoughts run through your head - "Am I really worth this much?" "My gift to them was only half the price of this" "I didn't get them a gift last year - now I have to get them something next year!"

- And when we think about the grace of Christ - I think we can do the same:
 - Surely, it's just too good to be true, Am i really worth that much? Surely I've got to prove my worth and earn this somehow?
 - Or there's a prideful part in us that wants to earn our salvation...or really prove our worth...
- Well - those were the sort of doubts that were being planted in the hearts and minds of the Galatians.
- And so - Paul reminds them...don't try and add on the Law to Christ. Because the Law can't save.
- Don't try and work your way to God through law following - because it just won't work.

- Now - it's important to note here, that in these following verses, Paul isn't saying that the Law is bad. He isn't throwing it out completely. BUT he's saying that if you try to use the Law to earn salvation, you are using the wrong tool for the job.
- The Law isn't bad - it just can't save people. It was always designed to point beyond itself to Jesus - the one who is mighty to save! (as we'll see in more detail next week)
 - Paul is saying here: Trying to follow the Law in order to be saved, is like trying to use a wooden spoon as a jackhammer. Wooden spoons aren't bad! But they just aren't the right tool for the job.

- V10 "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone 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.""
- If you want to rely on the Law to be saved - good luck. But it isn't going to work.
- To be saved through the Law, one has to do EVERYTHING written in the Law.
 - This is a quote from Deuteronomy 27 - from Moses' last sermon to the Israelites on the edge of the promised land.
- And throughout Israel's history - even in the so called "hero's of the faith" - they couldn't do everything written in the Law!
- But their justification never came through the Law - but through faith in the one who gave the Law.
- Ps 51 reminds us:
 - 51:16 "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
 - you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
 - The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
 - a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
- God doesn't want cold-hearted religiosity or people who just tick the right boxes but their hearts are far from him.
- In fact in Isaiah, God tells his people that he is sick of it! He's sick of their cold sacrifices, their stale Torah following - he wants to vomit it all back up!
- Because the Torah was never designed to justify people.
- But it was always by faith.
- V11 "The righteous shall live by faith" - as Paul quotes from Habbakuk

- And so we receive God's gift by faith.
- V13 "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"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."
- That curse that all are under because of disobedience - has been completely taken away from us by Jesus' death on the cross.
- Paul quotes Deuteronomy again. The reference in the original context wasn't particularly for crucifixion but for the practice of people's corpses being strung up and exposed after death.
 - Taking away any last shred of dignity; any last shred of humanity.
 - Crucifixion was much the same. Completely shameful. Utterly horrible. Unspeakable humiliation. Cursed is the one who is hung on the tree.

- But Jesus took that curse for us.
- We deserved the curse of the Law, the punishment for our disobedience - but instead, we receive the blessing.
- He paid the ransom to free us, he released the chains of the law and sin!

- Which means we are now free. Free to receive the blessing of justification, free to receive the Spirit. Through Faith!
- That blessing that was promised through Abraham now comes to us through Jesus Christ through faith in him.
 - And all those who trusted in the Lord before Jesus - they too are saved through Jesus' once-for-all death on the cross for both Jew and Gentile.
 - They were never saved through the Law, but through the one who fulfilled the Law and took the curse of the Law for them.
- And for us here today - all we need to do is put our trust in Jesus! Have faith in him! And this hope is ours today!
- There is no curse to bear - because Jesus has taken us for us.
- So then what makes a Christian a Christian?
- Someone who follows Jesus. Who has turned away from their sins, and turns to Christ. Someone who has faith in Jesus.
- So don't overcomplicate it!
- Don't move on from Faith in Christ! Don't try and "top up" grace by your own works, don't add on burdens or terms and conditions to your relationship with God that were never meant to be there in the first place!
- But revel in the freedom that the Gospel gives us. Preach that grace to yourself time and time again.
- And enjoy the free gift.