

# Have you been bewitched?

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[0:00] Open your Bibles at Galatians chapter 3. And Paul, you'll notice, starts with a quite striking statement.

! He asks the Galatians, who has bewitched you? Have you been ensorcelled or glamourous?! Perhaps that would be a rather old-fashioned phrase, but we might more likely say today, have you been taken in by some clever scam?

Did you get a phone call or an email that had some plausible argument in it? And did you begin to be taken in and drawn in by this argument?

But in the end, turns out the argument is specious. It's plausible, but it's wrong. It's specious. It's fallacious.

I suppose by asking, have you been bewitched? He's asking, has your mind been confused? Have you, somebody put a spell on you so you're not thinking clearly?

[1:16] That's the question Paul asked these Galatians, and through them it's the question that he asked us this evening. There's a change of tack, as it were, in the book of Galatians at this point.

Up to now, Paul has been justifying his own ministry and talking about the circumstances and that particular embarrassing moment when he confronted the apostle Peter in public.

But now, at this point, Paul turns from sort of describing what happened to a theological analysis of what was going wrong in the Galatian church.

Now, one of the things that Paul did was he said, it's not my gospel I'm preaching to you. It's the gospel that was given to me by the Lord Jesus.

And I suppose it's legitimate to check that claim. So I thought I would start just by reminding you of a few things the Lord Jesus himself said, which is really all that Paul is expanding on in this letter.

[2:31] So let me just read a few verses. First of all, John 6, 29, Jesus was asked, what work do we do to achieve eternal life? And Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe the one he has sent.

Or in the book of Mark, Paul had asked the Galatians, have they been bewitched?

Jesus asked his disciples a similar question. Are you so dull? Have you failed to understand? I gather that the are you so dull is a slightly sort of blandish translation.

It's a bit more stronger than that, really. Are you so dull, he asked. Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean?

For it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach and then out of his body. And so in saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. And then, of course, that well-known verse from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 17, do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets, I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

[3:49] And that really could be Paul's text in Galatians 3. What does that actually mean to say that Christ has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it?

So having now established his apostleship and confronted Peter's hypocrisy, Paul, as I say, leaves personal testimony and history aside and experience and turns instead to theology.

Because the arguments of the circumcision party must be met. In several pages of rather dense argument, Paul sets about demolishing their case.

The style of the argument is rabbinic and may seem a little strange to modern ears, but it still uses the same principles of logic, an argument that we can get to grips with.

Paul's basic method here is what we, if you have been trained in the more Greek Aristotelian school of logic, is what is known as reducto ad absurdum, reduction to the absurd.

[5:04] He shows, in other words, that the thinking of the circumcision party, if you follow it to its logical conclusion, inevitably will lead to self-contradiction and nonsensical position.

So I think we do need to keep this in mind when we look at verses such as 3.12 when he says, the law is not based on faith, on the contrary, the man who does these things will live by them.

I mean, is Paul actually claiming here that Moses was wrong and that by implication anyone who lived under the old covenant was condemned. No, he can't be claiming that. That would be nonsensical, of course.

That really would be absurd. I think his point, when he argues this way, is that if you interpret the law in this way, you will necessarily land up with nonsense. And Paul's going to go on in the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4 to explain how the law should be understood.

And as I say, Paul's argument is presented in rabbinic style, but that doesn't overrule the basic principles of logic, the basic principles of how we read and interpret the scripture.

[6:19] And so, let's move on to examine Paul's argument in rather more detail. And in essence, the argument, I think, can be broken down into three stages. And you can imagine them perhaps, and obviously, from what we've got written in Galatians 3, it's just Paul's side of the argument.

But you could imagine perhaps that he is, in his mind, arguing with the things that the Galatians or the circumcision party might raise. And so, I suggest that we might think of that as Paul actually answering three questions.

And the first question, which we're going to look at this evening, they might be saying, isn't circumcision the most important marker of the covenant? Isn't circumcision the thing that shows those who are really within the covenant?

covenant with the ones whom God really approves of? The one, isn't circumcision the sign of God's favor? And Paul's answer is no, that is faith.

That's the most important marker of the covenant. But the circumcision people might come back and say, well, okay, Abraham had faith, we accept that.

[7:33] but after all, he was still required to circumcise his offspring, wasn't he? So doesn't that mean that circumcision and the other rituals of the law still matter?

And Paul's answer to that, as we shall see next week, is that he should say, no, that's actually to misunderstand the law and in particular to misunderstand what Christ came to do.

And then, you might go on to say, so the law has no relevance to Christians and actually, it doesn't matter what we do, we're free and so we can do what we like.

And Paul's saying, no, that's not the case at all. In fact, in a sense, the law is what guarantees our freedom as heirs of the promise. And that's what he deals with in chapter four.

So in the next three weeks, we're going to be looking really at these three questions and the answer that Paul gives to them. So this evening, we're just going to look at the first one in these first 14 verses.

[8:42] Isn't circumcision the most important covenant marker, the sign of God's favor? And Paul says, no, this isn't the case.

And he refutes this by referring to two things. First of all, he refers to our own gospel experience in verses one to five.

And secondly, he refers to the experience of Abraham in verses six to 14. But you might think those were very different things.

But actually, if you look closely, if you look at verse six and verse eight and verse 14, you'll see that actually Paul is saying that our experience and the experience of Abraham were essentially the same.

Because in fact, they were both believing the same gospel. And we'll say a bit more about that in a minute. So although the argument is broken into two sections, it is one argument that there is just one gospel.

[10:00] And in a sense, we are mimicking the experience of Abraham or Abraham is prefiguring our experience of the gospel. So let's look at this argument then in a bit more detail.

Oh, I should have said then once we've looked at the argument, of course, I'm then going to say, well, we're not really interested in circumcision, are we? But does this have any relevance for us? So we will look at what the relevance for us is later at the end. So is circumcision the sign of God's favor?

And Paul's first answer is to ask the Galatians and therefore by extension to ask us also, what it was that actually changed their lives?

Some of them, no doubt, would have been Jews and they already had the law. They had already been circumcised, presumably on the eighth day. At least the males had, anyway.

[11:10] And yet, they must have realized that they were still missing something because otherwise what were they doing in the church of Jesus Christ? Their experience as Jews had been that the law didn't provide what it was that they felt they really needed.

And some of those people in that church would have been Gentiles. Well, we know that, of course, because what caused the crisis was that the Jews and Gentiles were stopping, were refusing to eat together.

So we know that we're both in these Galatian churches. So what about the Gentiles? How had they landed up sitting in that church in Galatia?

Was it that they suddenly discovered a whole new exciting world of Jewish ritual? I mean, there had been people that had become converts to Judaism, quite a lot, in fact, in Roman times.

But in that case, the question again, was that what brought them to the church of Jesus Christ? Christ, they suddenly realized the relevance of all these complicated rituals and laws.

[12:29] And Paul says, of course not. Jew or Gentile, the reason you're sitting here in this chair or pew or whatever it was they were sitting on, Paul reminds them all that Jew and Gentile, the thing that changed their lives was the public proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified, verse 1.

How did the Spirit come to them? It was through believing the message. That's what he reminds them of in verse 3. And what was their root of the experience of the Christian life in verse 4?

Actually, the commentators and translations differ as to whether the experience in verse 4 refers to the experience of the Spirit, as some translations put, and I think the new NIV actually takes, or the experience of suffering, as the older NIV translates it.

But you can translate the verse either way, but it doesn't actually make that much difference to the argument. The fact is that they're already gone through a lot of stuff, a lot of good stuff and a lot of bad stuff, in their experience of the Christian life.

And why had they done that? What had led them into that? Was it because of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified, or was it because of some ritual they'd signed up for?

[14:02] And their present experience of the spirit in verse 6, where does that come from? Do you find that the spirit comes to you again through some ritual of the law, or through the coming back again to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?

How is the spirit at work in their churches? Surely it's through the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the gospel Jesus Christ publicly declared as crucified was the thing that changed their lives at the beginning, and was still changing their lives from day to day.

And perhaps that argument alone would have been enough to convince them, but still, it is always a bit dangerous in appealing to experience alone. Experience has to be interpreted after all by the word of God.

And so, Paul now turns to his scriptural argument, Old Testament scriptural argument. And there's a bit actually missed out here of course, because the question is, where did this sign of circumcision actually come from?

If you just read Galatians and you didn't sort of look it up in Genesis, you might think it came from the law of Moses, but in fact it doesn't actually. The command to circumcise the seed of Abraham was actually given to Abraham in Genesis 17 when, in verses 10 to 14, when Abraham was commanded to circumcise those born in his house and those who came into his house were brought into his house.

[15:55] And of course, that's why there's all this talk later on in the chapter of Abraham's seed, Abraham's descendants. It's not actually a

requirement of the Mosaic law, it's actually a requirement of the Abrahamic covenant, as we say, the law that was given to Abraham.

But notice where it comes in Genesis. It comes in Genesis chapter 17. Remember that. And so Paul is saying, is Abraham's experience somehow different from the experience of those Galatian Christians and different from the experience of Christians today?

Did he find out a different way to be justified, a different way to be marked as righteous by God?

Abraham, after all, was called the friend of God, wasn't he?

But Paul says, no, that's not at all the truth. In fact, in essence, Abraham's experience of God was the same as that of the Galatians and the same as ours.

And why does he say that? Well, he makes a remarkable claim, doesn't he, in verse 8? Because actually, Abraham had the same gospel preached to him.

[17:15] A remarkable thing to claim. Perhaps it wasn't preached so clearly. Perhaps now, with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can understand it better and see how it works better.

But what Paul claims is that actually, the message that Abraham received was the same gospel.

And what was the promise? It was the promise that his descendant, perhaps shall we say, or descendants, depending on how you read it, but that the seed of Abraham would bless all nations. And that, says Paul, actually, is the gospel in the nutshell, as it were, in essence. Abraham had the gospel preached to him all those years ago, and that's what the Abrahamic covenant, the promise to Abraham, was all about.

the gospel is already there in Genesis chapter 12. Notice Genesis chapter 12, not chapter 17.

And what was the result of this message that Abraham received? Well, we're told that Abraham believed God, and on that basis, God declared Abraham righteous.

[18:37] Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. And where does that come from? Well, if you look it up, it comes from Genesis chapter 15, verse 6.

This was years before circumcision came in, and it certainly didn't mean that Abraham never did anything wrong. In fact, if you read the story of Abraham, he'd go on to do a lot of strange things, and a lot of things that definitely weren't right.

And yet, God says that in his eyes, Abraham was righteous. Why? Because he believed God. This was years before the command to circumcise his offspring.

But Paul will come back to that later. So it is faith, on the basis of faith, that Abraham was declared as righteous.

What about the law? Does that make us righteous? Well, in fact, no, the law actually has exactly the opposite effect, doesn't it? Look at verses 10 to 14.

[19:52] The law shows us, in fact, that we are unrighteous. if we go by the law, God has to look at us and say, no, you've broken the commands.

And it's worth pointing out, as one of the commentators does, that actually the Jewish rabbis were not completely stupid. They did realize that you can't actually keep the whole law perfectly.

you remember when they were brought a woman taken in adultery to Jesus and said, shall we stone her?

And Jesus said, let the one without sin cast the first stone. That was kind of a reference to what Phil was talking about this morning, I think, in Deuteronomy. Who's going to cast the first stone?

And actually, none of them could do it. Not even those self-righteous Pharisees could do it. Even they had to acknowledge that they were not without sin. They realized you can't keep the law perfectly.

[20:57] And of course, that presents you with a problem. And so, the rabbis tried to address the question of, well, what's this kind of statutory minimum?

What would you have to do to stay within the fold of the covenant? What would you have to actually do to not be purged from the people of Israel? But of course, the trouble is this argument in the end leads you nowhere.

Because the answer has to be all of it, all of the law. If you're to be made righteous through the law, declared righteous through the law, you have to keep all of it.

And if you've committed a burglary, you're a criminal. It doesn't matter that you haven't committed murder or rape or dangerous driving. It only takes one crime to make a criminal, doesn't it? If you've broken the law once, anywhere, then necessarily you're unrighteous. And so I'd suggest to you that in fact, in one sense, Paul is almost deliberately misinterpreting Leviticus 18, verse 5, here, when he says that it's, let me just read it, Leviticus, it's, I'm in place now, clearly no one is justified by the law, I've forgotten which verse it is now, verse 13, cursed is everyone who's, no, that's the other one, cursed is everyone who's not continuing to do everything written in the book of the law, and the righteous will live by faith, I'm not sure which one is Leviticus 13 now, but there are quotations from the law, Leviticus 18, in a sense, that actually

[22:58] Moses was not really saying that you had to keep every law, but the problem was they interpreted it that way, they interpreted it as saying the law would declare them as righteous, I think Paul's using what we might call an ad hominem argument here, they are arguing that way, and they say if you're going to argue that way, that the law is what makes us righteous, then it has to be all the law, and if you look more carefully at what Leviticus says, actually it is saying of course that it is in meditating in the law, that we find the way to God, and we find, faith is always important, and of course Paul is going to go on and make that argument later, but if you're going to argue that it is the law that declares us righteous, then that only works if you've kept all of it, and no one has kept all of it, or rather no one except one, as Paul is going to go on to say in a minute.

God is the God God is the God to God now you might say, well isn't Paul making this argument up for himself, actually if you go back to the Old Testament, doesn't it actually say that well, actually it does say that you've got to keep all these laws if you want to come to God, so I think it's worth pointing out that actually the Old Testament doesn't say that at all, it's not the ritual that matters, every prophet comes up with very much the same argument, it's almost the theme of the prophets, of the Old Testament prophets, let me just read you one, I could have chosen 20, 30, almost any prophet you care to name, I'm sure I could find, at some point in their book they say something like this, but this is from Isaiah, the multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me, says the Lord, I'm more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals, I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats, when you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts, stop bringing meaningless offerings, your incense is detestable to me, new moons, sabbaths, convocations, I cannot bear your evil assemblies, the assemblies were supposed to be holy, places where people came to God in faith, came together to worship the Lord and to pray for forgiveness, darkness, but Isaiah is saying that these assemblies weren't holy assemblies at all, they were evil assemblies, it's not just going through the ritual that is what the law is about, and I say almost any prophet you could name, one could find something like that that says very much the same thing, so in verses 13 and 14

Paul reaches the climax of his argument, the law is God's word, that's true, but the law says that we're all unrighteous,!

And so how can God declare anyone righteous, even Abraham? because Abraham certainly didn't do everything right, didn't follow all God's commands perfectly, and yet God says of Abraham that in his eyes Abraham was righteous, so that's the crucial question, isn't it?

[27:04] How can this contradiction be resolved? And it turns out the answer is actually in that very curse of the law, verse 13.

Because Paul says actually there was one who kept the law perfectly, Jesus of Nazareth, the true anointed king in the line of David, he's going to go on to say that that's what circumcision is about, the seed was truly circumcised, but before he gets to that point, verse 13, he says of the Jesus of Nazareth, the law's curse could not touch him directly because he was without sin.

The law's verdict on the Lord Jesus Christ was yes, righteous, righteous, but because of that, because he was innocent of any fault, that meant that he could become the kinsman redeemer, that meant he could be, his righteousness could be as we say imputed to Abraham, and to all those who inherit Abraham's blessing.

Although he describes Jesus as the only seed, the true seed, he's not saying that he's the only inheritor of the blessing, far from it. Verse 14, he says that all those who inherit Abraham's blessing,

in fact, earlier you may have noticed he said that who are the children of Abraham, the true seed of Abraham, all those who share Abraham's faith.

Jesus could pay the ransom price that was demanded by the law, by taking the guilty verdict on himself.

[29:07] And he's going to go on to say that Jesus Christ is the true descendant of Abraham, in verse 16, we'll pick that up next week. And he was the one who was really circumcised, who really obeyed the law, and through that, all who are in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of course, I'm sure it means men and women, one thing about circumcision, of course, is it only applied to men, but all who are the seed of Abraham by faith are circumcised, as Paul says elsewhere, in the heart, by being incorporated in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one who truly was declared righteous by the law, and it is the Lord's righteousness, it is the Lord Jesus Christ whose righteousness is what God sees when he looks at Abraham and those who share Abraham's faith.

Paul's going to go on, as I say, to expand this on this idea in the second half of chapter three, but we'll come back to that next week. but instead let's just consider a few things for ourselves, some applications of this passage to us because circumcision may not be a hot topic for us, as far as I don't know if anyone here is of Jewish ancestry or not, I don't know, but either way it's probably not a hot topic, but the wider question of how we are declared righteous by God certainly is important, and the question of how we go, how we live the Christian life, and the role of faith in that life certainly is important.

So let's just draw a few lessons out of this, and the first thing I'd like to, point I'd like to make actually is that faith and reason are not in opposition.

The new atheists and lots of people would like to tell us that, they would like to tell us that it's unreasonable to have faith, or that if you have faith you're being irrational, and yet Paul's argument here is based on rational argument.

In fact, reason depends on faith, you have to have faith that the universe actually makes sense and is subject to the laws of logic. But faith is subject also to reasoned argument.

[31:44] You can say that you can give a defense of it, and that's exactly what the Apostle Peter tells us to do in his letter, in 1 Peter 3 15. He says, in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord, always be prepared to give an answer.

The Greek there is actually an apologia, an argument, a reasoned defense. to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. The answer is not, I don't know, it doesn't make sense, but I believe it anyway.

That wouldn't meet Peter's criterion, it wouldn't meet Paul's criterion. Give a reasoned defense to anyone who asks you why you have this hope.

But, Peter goes on to say, do this with gentleness and respect. So often logical debate is conducted from a position of arrogance, isn't it?

We know what we're talking about and the rest of you are ignorant and stupid. But, Peter says, no, don't do it that way. Do it with gentleness, do it with respect, listen to what your opponent has to say, but be prepared to give a reasoned argument.

[33:11] Last Wednesday, we were looking at the story of the storm on the lake. And Jesus accused the disciples, when they were caught in a storm on the lake, of lack of faith.

I think it was the Mark version we looked at on Wednesday, but it's also in Luke, Luke, in Luke chapter 8 verse 25, he accuses the disciples of lack of faith.

Now, why does he do that? Was he suggesting that no fisherman has ever been drowned in a storm? Well, of course not. If you're a fisherman, that's an occupational hazard you live with.

People are drowned every day, almost. that's an everyday event. No, it wasn't the fact that storms were dangerous was the way that they lacked faith.

Storms are dangerous, of course. It was that the disciples hadn't thought it through. They hadn't understood that Jesus had authority over the winds and the water.

[34:19] And they hadn't reasoned it out that Jesus told them and indicated that his mission was not yet finished, his time had not yet

come. And they hadn't reasoned it out that if the son of man was there in the boat with him and he told them that his time had not yet come, then they weren't going to drown because the time had not yet come.

If they had thought it through rather than panicked, then they would have saved themselves a lot of terror, wouldn't they? If they had reasoned it out. So don't let the new atheist tell you that faith denies reason.

And also don't let some super spiritual Christians try and tell you that thinking shows a lack of faith. It was Peter in that situation in Galatians who was guilty of not thinking, of just reacting.

Paul said to the Galatians, don't be bewitched, don't be ensorcelled, don't fall for the scam, think it through carefully. And so I say Christians don't abandon logic, don't abandon reason and science, and don't abandon common sense, but rather give a reasoned defense for the hope that you have. And the second point I'd like to make from this passage is that faith requires no add-ons for salvation. For salvation.

[35:58] If you have a healthy diet, then you don't need vitamin supplements. Faith needs no add-ons, no supplements as the basis of salvation.

It was faith alone, sola fides, faith alone, which was the basis on which God declared Abraham righteous.

And faith is the source of spiritual life. Chapter 3, verse 5, that's what's driving your spiritual experience, it's faith. There's always pressure, isn't there, to add something else.

Rituals. Incense and Vicar's Handbag stuff, whereas the Holy Waters misses, Vicar's Handbags caught on fire. Rules.

No drinking, no smoking, no dancing, no cinema. If you'd ask somebody perhaps 50s or what's, you know, what's wilderness?

[37:08] Wilderness is drinking, dancing, smoking, and going to the cinema. Well, it's not. And certainly, that doesn't make you right with God.

There are other things we could add on, theological knowledge. Well, actually, of course, Peter does tell us to add knowledge, but why? What about spiritual experiences through music or through spiritual gifts?

all kinds of additions on, aren't there? All kinds of second blessings. Now, of course, some of these things are valuable in themselves and some of them aren't.

But, and Paul is going to address that issue later, but the point is that these are not add-ons to faith. Our spiritual experience is driven by faith.

They proceed from faith. Add to your faith knowledge and so on and says Peter. Add not in the sense of supplementing, but that it comes from faith.

[38:17] There's no point in having knowledge if you don't start with faith. And Hebrews tells us that without faith, it's impossible to please God.

Nothing else will do. You might try and put something else in its place, but nothing else will do. If it's real faith, like the faith that Abraham had, then that is what, on that basis, that is what God chooses to declare us as righteous, as within the covenant, as those on whom he puts his favor.

But of course, it does have to be the right sort of faith. It does have to be real faith. And so at this point, we should remind ourselves of the words of James, who also comments on Abraham, and says the following, was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend, James 2, 21 to 23.

That's a necessary reminder. Faith is not just believing a set of propositions, or signing up to some doctrinal basis.

[39:54] Faith is believing God and acting on that belief. As James quite rightly points out, it is when Abraham offered up his son, remembering the promise that through that son all nations will be blessed, and so he offered up his son, not understanding perhaps quite how that was going to

work, but believing that God would make good on his promise.

So let's make sure that the faith that we have is saving faith, not the faith of those who say, oh, didn't I cast out many demons and work miracles in your name, but we're not those to whom Jesus will say, depart from me, I don't know who you are, I've never met you.

We will not be called God's friend with that sort of faith, but if we have the faith that Abraham had, that we believe what God has said and build our lives around that promise, then God will count us as righteous.

John reminds us that not all spirits are the Holy Spirit and not all faith is saving faith, some faith is mere presumption, like the faith of that Pharisee in the parable who said, Father, I thank you that I'm not as other men.

That's not saving faith, that's presumption. But saving faith puts our trust in God's promise and in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[41:43] And so let me remind you what Jesus said, the work of God is this, to believe the one he has sent, and to, I'm sure he means also to act upon that belief.

And thirdly, the third lesson, which comes out of that one really, is that like everything else in the Christian life, faith is not just an individual thing.

We've been thinking, haven't we, about church membership. But faith is the life force of any living church. It's true that the visible marker of the church is love.

Jesus says, if you, by this will all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another. But behind that and driving it is faith.

Faith in the words and in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's how we're able to love one another. Faith is what makes the church go, what makes the church run, as it were, as Paul's pointed out, hasn't he, in verses one to six.

[42:56] That's what changed their life, faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, publicly proclaimed as crucified. That's what changed their lives at the beginning, and that's what's driving their spiritual experience now.

And if that was true for the Galatians 2,000 years ago, it's equally true for our church now. Faith is what drives the church, as it were, it's what makes it progress.

Paul asked a similar question to the Ephesians in Acts 19, he asked them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they answered, no, we've not even heard there's a Holy Spirit. There was something amiss with their faith, and the evidence that their faith wasn't right was that the Holy Spirit had not come.

because the Spirit comes in response to true faith, as Galatians tells us in chapter 3, verse 2. It is true that the Spirit goes where he wills, and we can't always see it, and yet it was, the evidence of faith was the coming of the Spirit.

Spirit. But of course, all this has to work together, doesn't it? Faith, as we've already said, faith in what?

[44:19] Not just any faith. Faith in what? What was it that Abraham believed? It was God's word and promise. And so we have that other great reform mantra, don't we?

Sola scriptura, scripture alone. Faith in what? In God's word and promises. No planning, no organization, no perceived gifts must supplant the role of faith in the life of our church.

All those are good things to have. The Spirit is a spirit of order. It's certainly not unspiritual to be well organized. Quite the reverse. But none of those things can take the place of faith.

And therefore none of those things can supplant the prayer meeting, can they? Because in a sense the prayer meeting is where we come together and exercise our faith.

Where we say, right, I'm putting this on the line. I'm going to thank the Lord for what he's done already. And on the basis of that and on his promises, I'm going to ask him to take us forward.

[45:35] We don't know where we're going, but he does. Nothing must supplant the role of faith in our church.

On the contrary, faith is the foundation, faith in the good news of Jesus Christ crucified. It doesn't sound like good news, does it? Jesus Christ crucified.

But Paul is going to go on in the rest of the chapter to explain why actually it is good news. Why that is the most important news there is. What was Abraham's response to God's promise?

Well, it was to leave Ur and head out into the desert. Of course, he was looking for a different city, as we're told in Hebrews 11. Something that was pointed out actually at the study group, this week that we did in Hayward's Heath, that there's an interesting, there's one character missing from the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, and that character is Joshua.

He doesn't get a mention. Well, we could speculate on why that is, but it may be because in fact, in a sense, Joshua did inherit the promise. He did lead them into the land. And the whole point of Hebrews 11 actually is that they and we are still seeking for a city whose builder and architect is God.

[47:09] Abraham was looking for a different city, not air, and we're not even looking for the earthly Jerusalem, but the true Jerusalem that is built by God himself.

Abraham's trust was in God's grace, that his promise was something that wasn't a scam.

The Galatians had been scammed or in danger of it, but God's promise is not a scam. He really means what he says. As a general rule, if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

But there's an exception to that, and that is when God says it. Ecclesiastes 4, verse 12, says that a threefold cord is not easily broken.

And so I've been working up, I suppose, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to that great Reformation slogan. Sola gracia, sola scriptura, sola fides.

[48:21] Grace alone, scripture alone, and faith alone. So as we be turning to prayer in our groups now, we'll sing again and then Chris will come out and organize us for the ending.