

Paul's message

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 September 2025

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] I'd asked the boys and girls what Paul was particularly good at and what God did for him. Did anybody spot it? What was Paul particularly good at? He says, I was really good at doing this. What do you think?

He was persecuting Christians and he was very good at that. Thank you very much. If good is the right word. Yes. Is there anything else that he was good at or enthusiastic about?

Being Jewish. Yes, that's right. He says, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my father. So he's very good at being Jewish. And what did God do for him?

Or to him? Got to go quicker than this, guys. We're going to be here all afternoon. What did God do? Yeah.

Well said. Yeah. He revealed his son in me. So something changed. He was very good at being Jewish. And then God did something to do with revealing his son in me.

[1 : 22] So let's we'll try and work our way through that a little bit as we go on. And I wanted to. Galatians is one of those letters where, in a sense, you've got to understand the whole thing before you see how the bits fit together.

And one of the important things that he talks about is, he's going to talk about it later, is justification. And I think it's probably helpful to have a little bit of this in our minds.

It's not actually mentioned in this text, but it is, it sort of is behind everything that's going on. Justification.

Justification. Now, hands up those of you who use that word in everyday speech. Hands up those who don't use that word in everyday speech.

Okay. Right. I was just checking sure that you were awake. Justification. It's what a judge does. And God is judge.

[2 : 20] And here's something that people might not realize, but it's true, that one day God will judge everybody. Paul says, talks about the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

So we will all meet God as judge. And what judges do is put people into two boxes. So here's somebody who's standing before the judge.

And maybe somebody says, this person is a thief. They took my electric bicycle and sawed it off where I tied it up and cycled away with it.

And I couldn't run fast enough to catch them. And they are a thief. And the judge does the judging. And he will either say that the person is this or the person is this.

Now then, I want to try and work on this. Anybody got a first idea of what either of those things could do in front of a judge? Say again? Oh, well done.

[3 : 34] Innocent. Or guilty. And if this guy was a thief, which box should he go in?

He should go in the guilty box. That's right. Now, in the Bible, there's various words that cover those ideas. So here is another word that begins with C.

Anybody like to guess this? C-O-N. Yeah. Grown-ups can join in this as well. Richard? Condemned. Yes. Condemned.

This is to be found guilty. And the condemned person, in due course, something will happen to a condemned person. Maybe immediately or maybe a little bit down the line.

A condemned person looks forward to what? Grown-ups as well? Punishment. Punishment. Yeah. A condemned person is going to be punished.

[4 : 38] That's what the judge does. I mean, the punishment needs to be fair and right, but it would be wrong if the judge said, oh, you're guilty, but that doesn't matter.

Because it does matter, doesn't it, if you're guilty? The innocent person. Any other words for innocent? There's one that begins A. I don't know whether it's got a C next to it.

Is that right? Is that how it goes? A-C-Q. Acquitted. Acquitted. Yeah. Acquitted. In the Bible, they would say this person is declared righteous.

Right. Righteous. Justified. All those words mean the same sort of thing.

And in this box, if the person goes into that box, they can only expect to be punished. Because that is fair and right. If the person gets put into this box, they should expect the government to support them and protect them.

[5 : 45] And if they ring the police, the police should come and help them. And if they go to the NHS, the NHS should heal them. And this person is in the right position.

They're justified. Now, God is a judge. Now, God is a judge. And he puts people into these two boxes. And the question is, how do you get into this box?

Of course, that's where we actually need to be. We need to be in the place where God is for us. We need to be where God says, this is a right person.

I will heal them. I will protect them. I will listen to them. I will answer their prayers. And how do we get into the box? Would somebody find Galatians 2, verse 16?

Now, I know Steve's going to deal with this. And I don't want to trespass too far into what he's going to be saying. But Galatians 2, 16. Could somebody just read that out loud, please?

[6 : 45] Nice loud voice. Yes, we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. So, also, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. Thank you very much. But this is the really surprising, striking, really gobsmacking truth that Paul experienced that he wants to tell other people.

That God justifies not by looking to see how many good things have you done? How many times have you prayed?

How many times have you kept your word? How many times have you stolen anything? He doesn't do it by that. He justifies people by what was the word that Mark said, the important word, justified by faith.

And in one place it says, God who justifies the ungodly. It's people who don't deserve to be put in this box. That God puts in that box because they've trusted in Jesus.

[8 : 03] That might be a very familiar idea to you, or it might be a completely new idea, but it is an amazing thing. We are justified not because of the works we have done.

Paul was not justified by being extremely good at being Jewish. He was justified in a completely different way by trusting in Jesus.

And I think that's a great thing. We're going to sing about that. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, meaning mood or frame of mind, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand.

All other ground is sinking sand. Now what number is it? Because it's not put up on here. So let's go back to the text.

[9 : 03] And the boys and girls told us what Paul had come from. So what had Paul come from? What had Paul come from?

Yeah. From persecuting Christians. Yeah, that's right. And he gave it a single word label. Judaism. Judaism. So here's my beautiful picture of the Apostle Paul. And he had been progressing in Judaism.

He was really good at it. But then something happened so that when he went forward, it was different. Now what was it that we said that God did? God did. Thank you.

Yep. Thank you. Yes, he called him by grace. Okay. He called him and it was by grace.

[10 : 27] Well done. Yes. And there was another particular thing that he said that God was pleased to. Does it say God was pleased to? What? Yeah, the next bit after called by his grace was what?

To reveal his son in him. So I'm going to put an arrow coming down so that this wasn't something that human beings did. It was something that God did, as it were, from above.

He did something in Paul. And so he was no longer... Judaism was something he left behind.

But he went on to live, as we were saying earlier, to live by faith in Jesus. Right. Let me just see where I was going to go with this.

Yeah. He had a... Something happened to his life from God. And he was never the same afterwards. And that's what being a Christian is.

[11:38] When God enters our lives and changes us, puts us on a completely different direction. In another place, Paul would say, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

And he said goodbye to Judaism. He was born again. That's another way. That's what Jesus talked about, the same change.

So I suppose I can stop and ask you, has that change happened to you? Has your life changed from where you were before to something completely new, where Christ is at the center, where you live by faith in Christ?

Now, let me just say, you might not be conscious exactly of when that happened. But are you now living by faith in Jesus?

Because if you can't say that, then whatever is the case, you're not really a Christian in the sense that Paul was. He's a sort of model for us in many ways as to what God can do in somebody's life.

[12:52] I was fully immersed in Judaism. God called me by his grace. God revealed Christ in me. And now I live by faith in Jesus Christ.

So let's just take that a little bit to pieces. So one of the things of Judaism, which you said, was, did Judaism lead him to love Jesus?

And the answer is, no. He persecuted Christians. Persecuted. He persecuted Christians.

And he was very zealous. That means keen, enthusiastic. And does it say, I was very zealous for Jesus? What does it say? Very zealous for?

Jealous for? I was very zealous for the traditions of my fathers. Yeah. For the Jewish traditions.

[13:57] Now, one thing that we need to be very clear about is that Judaism is not the same as the faith of the Old Testament.

Let me just repeat that. What Paul was in, Judaism, is not the faith that people in the Old Testament, believing people had in the Old Testament.

That's not what David had. That's not what Moses had. That's not what Abraham had. Judaism is something different to that. And let's just try and pick this to pieces, because it's a little bit of a subtle point. So, maybe you need to have a confer with your next door neighbor.

What do you think would be important features of Judaism? So, this is what you get, what Jewish people would get from the Old Testament.

So, 30 seconds to confer with your next door neighbor. Important things that people would have from Judaism. Okay, stop.

[15:04] Right. Everybody have something to say to their neighbor. Anybody like to suggest any things that would be strong in Judaism? Yeah, go on. Pardon?

Offerings. Offerings? Offerings? Okay. So, let's do... If I had a red color...

So, there's a dead sheep. Yeah? Offerings. Good. Right. Okay. Well done. Not eating certain things. So, let's do a veggie burger.

Okay. So, food. Yes? Yes? Talk. Torah. Torah. Wow. That deserves a round of applause.

Yes? Torah. Okay. The Torah is the Old Testament law. And so, let's put a Hebrew letter in there.

[16:05] Old Testament law. Yeah. Torah. Well done. Yeah. Anything else? Yeah? Shabbat. Yeah. Wow.

That deserves a round of applause. As well. So, he talks about the calendar. Dates, seasons, days, whatever.

So, that's a calendar. And that... Oh, yeah. And there's one other thing that... Sorry, I missed something. Oh, yeah. Go on.

Yeah. Yeah. One God. Yeah. One God. I think that monotheism deserves a round of applause as well. Because that's...

Monotheism. One other thing that was particularly relevant to the Galatian congregation, because people were saying, you ought to get this.

[17:06] and the clue is that it would apply to men only, men and boys only. Circumcision, yeah. So if there's room on here, I will do a sharp looking knife with some blood dripping from it.

Okay, circumcision. Now all of those things would be in Judaism. With one issue that Paul would say, all of those things are meant to do something.

They're meant to do something which he, in Judaism, did not accept. What are these things all supposed to do?

I mean, that one would probably be the biggest clue. These things were meant to do something which Paul resisted and wouldn't have accepted.

Arsema. Put you right before God. Put you right before God. Let's hold that thought because I can tease that out a little bit.

[18 : 25] Is it being cleansed? Is it being cleansed? Yeah, do all these things do that? What is it meant to do? If I put an arrow. What's the sacrifice of lambs meant to do or meant to point to?

Let's put it that way. Yep. Take their sins. I can't hear. Take their sins.

Yeah, it takes their sins. Now then, tell me, does the blood of lambs and goats take away sins? What takes away sins? The blood of Christ.

The sacrifices are meant to point to Christ. That's their meaning. And so, if a person of faith was told, like the eunuch, the Ethiopian eunuch, who is he referring to?

He's referring to Jesus Christ. That's what it's meant to point to. To point to Christ. And all these things are meant to lead us to Christ.

[19 : 44] It's like a school teacher to lead us to Christ. So, the law is meant to lead us to Christ. I mean, for one thing, it shows us that we're sinners, doesn't it?

And then, it shows us that we need a savior. Does the law save us? No. In Judaism, they would have said the law saved us.

But, in the Old Testament, it would say the law leads us to Christ. And the food laws, do food laws save us? They're fulfilled in Christ.

And times and dates and seasons. Do times and dates and seasons save us? No. They're supposed to lead us to Christ. And circumcision is like a badge that covers all of this.

Now, you know rainbow flags. Have you gone through Brighton and seen a building with rainbow flags on it? What does the rainbow flag mean? Or what's it supposed to mean? What do they think it means?

[20 : 48] Yeah, gay pride. Gay and all the LBTQ, etc., etc. If you put that rainbow flag, you're saying, I'm up for all of that. That's what you're saying, anyway.

If you're circumcised, you're saying, I'm up for all of this. And the thing about Judaism is it takes all this, but it won't lead us to Christ.

It will say, no, it's nothing to do with Christ. It all just, it's just itself. And what Paul came to do was to say, these things do not save me.

No matter how hard I stick to the calendar, no matter how careful I am with the things I eat and I touch, that doesn't save me. All these things are meant to do is lead me to Christ.

And now I've realized that. And it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Christ is my all in all. All my righteousness is not got by observing these things.

[21 : 48] It's got through Jesus Christ. Does that make sense? And that's a wonderful truth, isn't it? We're not saved by our observance or our law keeping or our ethnic heritage.

All of these things are nothing compared with Christ. And we're going to sing a song which says that, I think. All I once held dear, built my life upon, all this world reveres and wars to own.

All I once thought gain, I have counted loss. Spent and worthless now compared to this. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord. It's 723 in the book. Please stand when the music starts. Thank you.

So we'll just take one more look into the passage, and then we'll sing a closing song. And Jerome's going to close in prayer, and then we'll have our picnic lunch all being well.

[23 : 10] So let's just take a little bit more about the Apostle Paul. So I'll just draw a portrait of him. He changes every time I draw in, doesn't he?

that's not very good Paul had opposition and there are people who are not pleased with him and who are saying things about him and the sort of things they're saying, you can sort of work out from what he says in reply so they say he picked it up second hand he doesn't really know what he's talking about he got it from somebody else but he got it wrong and then other people say well he changes what he says to please his audience he's a man pleaser other people say he's slack he reduces and cheapens God's standards because he doesn't tell people to be circumcised and eat special foods he's gone slack and some people say he's a traitor that he's abandoned his heritage

the law of Moses etc so he's got it second hand he's got it wrong he's slack he's a traitor and yeah that will do can anybody tell us from the passage oh we only got half the message he needed to add to what he says can anybody tell us from the passage his basic answer to those accusations and I'll give you an arrow to give you a clue do you know what his basic answer to those accusations it's like in verses 11 and 12 and it's also in chapter 1 verse 1 thank you it's come direct from revelation thank you it's come direct from revelation ask someone what were you going to say come direct from God it's

Paul's gospel is not something that he's made up by talking to other people and something that he's got half wrong because he's talked to them it's something that's direct from God and it uses the word revelation uses the word twice actually by revelation and revealing God's son in him so some of the aspects of Paul is just like everybody else some aspects of what happened to Paul are totally unique what if so let's just pick out the revelation things chapter 1 verse 1 I am an apostle an apostle is a sent authorized representative sent not from men nor by a man but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead he says that's what I claim to be an apostle and in verse 11 he says

I want you to know brothers and sisters the gospel I preached is not of human origin I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ and he's saying that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ he is officially sent by Jesus Christ if we're listening to him and his gospel we're listening to what God says we're listening to what Jesus wants us to hear and the fact that he's an officially sent person is a little bit like if you buy things off the internet you can buy the real thing so I in case anybody has a Rolex watch this is a very expensive Rolex watch this small I'll just use that as an example a real expensive Rolex watch costs a lot of money but you can probably get something that looks similar off Timu or Ebay and it's probably just plastic but it looks like the real thing you need to get a Rolex watch from a Rolex authorized dealer and you need to get spiritual truth from the authorized spokesman and that's what an apostle is he has been singled out by Jesus

Christ to be an apostle there were other apostles as well but only a few of them we should believe what he says we should listen to what he says there's a passage a little bit further on to see if I can find it in chapter 5 verse 4 he says you who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ you have fallen away from grace and I'll just sort of conclude with this thought that we should be listening that's an ear we should be listening to what Paul says we are privileged to have Bibles so it's actually not that difficult to listen to what Paul says we can read our Bibles I told you the other day I went to a church where through the entire service we never had any reading from scripture at all we had some lovely songs we had some fascinating testimonies people prayed some nice prayers but we never listened to what

[29 : 29] God says and I just want to say how important it is to listen he sent the apostle Paul he's given us Paul's writings in the Bible we should be listening to them and the risk is that if we don't listen we do what it said in 5.4 we get the wrong idea we go back to the old ways and we fall away from grace and we become strangers to Jesus Christ we become alienated from Christ and if you're somebody who only comes to church occasionally and doesn't actually read your Bible in between that is probably where you're at you are probably losing grip of grace and you're probably becoming a stranger to Jesus Christ and here's what you should do you should get back into relationship with the Lord Jesus you should start listening to what he says you should start obeying him and walking by faith which is what obeying him is so that you can say as the apostle Paul says the life

I live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me and that's grace that's his goodness and undeserved kindness towards us that's what we need to immerse ourselves in that's what we need to be grateful for that's what we need to be close to that's what we need to have flowing through our thoughts and through our hearts isn't it his grace towards us in the Lord Jesus Christ and brothers and sisters let's live that way shall we the life we live in the faith the life we live in the body we live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me that's the gospel that's what we listen to amen we're going to sing a song and then we're going to sing 772 amazing grace and Jerome will close in prayer for us