

By Faith, Not Works

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[0 : 00] Lord God, our Father, this morning we thank you for your word to us and to the Galatians. We pray this morning you'd give us ears to listen and hearts to understand as we read your word.

Please help us to be challenged by what we read in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. So, did you know that in a week we're going to have a federal election?

I expect most of you did know. It's everywhere. It's on TV. It's on posters. People are talking about it. It's hard not to know.

When we vote, we have to put our trust in someone that we think can represent us the best. You choose someone who agrees with your views for what the government should do.

You choose the person who will advocate for things that you value. But, let's face it, politicians aren't always that reliable, are they?

[1 : 14] It gets especially hard to trust them recently with all the backstabbing that we've had over the last decade. So, some people give up on relying on others and decide to make their own party.

And they run for parliament themselves. For example, this guy. I'm sure you know him, Clive Palmer. But, it's a lot of work and money.

And in the end, they never actually win, do they? Only the big parties win. Well, in today's passage, we're presented with a similar choice.

Although, obviously, it's a bit different. When it comes to being made right with God, we have to choose to put our trust not in a politician to represent us, thankfully, but in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Or, we could try to do it ourselves like Clive Palmer, to try and make ourselves right with God by our own works and effort. Now, it should be an obvious choice, right?

[2 : 23] And yet, we can struggle with it. Thinking that we need to do certain things to impress God, the Galatian Christians struggled as well.

Some of them were fooled into thinking they had to add works of the Old Testament law to their faith to make themselves right with God. This is what justification means.

To be made right with God. So, Paul wrote to them to explain why our justification comes by faith alone in Christ and not works of the law.

Now, we're on to the first point in your outlines, if you've got them. They're in the pew sheets, I think. So, our first point starts with Paul giving an example of when Peter did this same thing.

Let's read together from verse 11. When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

[3 : 37] For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew.

How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? So, when Cephas, that's Peter, came to Antioch, Paul opposed him.

Now, Peter, we know, was pretty important in the church, so that's quite bold, like opposing the archbishop. But it wasn't for no reason, for Peter stood condemned.

And Paul goes on to explain why. Peter used to eat with the Gentiles. We might remember how God taught him this in Acts 10, when he went to Cornelius' house.

[5 : 02] We can read, we read in Acts 10, from verse 28 and 29, on the slide, Peter said to them, You are well aware, that it is against our law, for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.

But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Here we see that the law said, Jews should not associate with Gentiles, which includes eating with them. The only way the Jews could eat with Gentiles was if the Gentiles followed their law and became Jews.

But God had taught Peter that everyone, Jew and Gentile, is saved in the same way, by faith or trusting in Jesus.

So then, when certain Jews arrived, Peter was afraid of them and he fell back to the law of separation.

[6 : 13] And worse, other Jewish Christians followed him, even Barnabas. So, this forced the Gentiles to follow the Jewish law too and to separate or to become Jews to eat in fellowship with them.

In other words, it forced them to live by faith plus law. A recent example of this is Brussels sprouts. Bear with me.

Who likes Brussels sprouts? Whoa. I'm surprised. I thought no one likes Brussels sprouts.

When I was young, mum tried cooking them for us once and even she didn't like them. So, she never got them again. But in the last week or so, if you've been watching MasterChef, a number of the elite chefs have been using them on the show.

Now, because the elite chefs use them, the others will feel pressure to add them to their meals as well. Even if they think they're terrible.

[7 : 34] It's in the same way, Peter, the elite apostle, added back these laws that Christians were freed from. Laws that even he had stopped following.

And as a result, the others felt the pressure to follow them as well. Then, before you know it, they've left the truth of the gospel, that we are saved by faith alone, and have added the Jewish law.

Now, the specific issue with Peter, the law of separation, is different to the issue for the Galatians, the law of circumcision. But that's actually really helpful, since it shows us that Paul's teaching in Galatians is not only about that one particular issue, but the general principle, living by faith plus works, rather than by faith alone in Christ.

But the only way to be made right with God, to be justified, is by faith, not law. Paul makes it clear in our second point on your outline.

We're going on from verse 15. We, who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles, know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Christ.

[9 : 00] So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law. Because by the works of the law, no one will be justified.

In verse 15, Paul is being sarcastic. In case you haven't picked up, he's mimicking some of the Jews by saying that Jews are better than Gentiles.

But then in verse 16, he shows, really, they're just as sinful. The Jews might think that they're better than the sinful Gentiles.

Yet it turns out even they know they cannot be justified by their own works of the law. Instead, they, too, need to put their faith in Christ to be made right with God.

If anyone was going to be justified by following the law, we expect it to be the Jews. But, if even they are justified by faith, how much more true is it for the Gentiles and for us?

[10 : 16] Verse 16 is the key verse for our passage and indeed for the whole letter. He spends the next few chapters explaining that we are justified by faith, not works.

And the reason is from verse 16. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. We can't justify ourselves before God by our works.

We can't do enough good things to make ourselves right with God. It's impossible. But people like to try, don't they? All other main religions are all about doing works.

Even Paul, we know, tried really hard to be the best Jew he could before he met Christ. A friend of mine was telling me about a colleague he had who was always trying out different religions.

For a while, he told me, she decided to be a Buddhist. So, every time they caught up, my friend would ask her things. Things like, how are you going at being perfect?

[11 : 32] Or, have you reached enlightenment yet? Or, have you been meditating enough this week? Naturally, these annoyed her. She would lose her patience and get angry with him.

Which meant, ironically, she'd failed right then. And she'd lost all her progress. The point is, no matter how hard we try to justify ourselves, it's impossible.

But we know that there is another, or rather, an only possible way of being justified. It's by faith in Christ, not works of the law.

As I said, this is Paul's key point for the Galatians and for us. So, in the rest of our chapter, he goes on to defend it.

He defends it in three ways. We're up to point number three on the outline. He has three defences and the first we find in verse 17 and 18.

[12:40] Let's read it. But, if in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin?

Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. The question in verse 17 is the kind of thing Paul's opponents would ask.

They would say, if Jews have to put their faith in Christ, then they're admitting they're sinners too.

So, doesn't that mean that following Christ makes people sinners?

Well, Paul's answer is clear. He says, no. The Jews don't become sinners by turning to Christ. They were already sinners, like everyone else.

So, of course, Christ doesn't promote sin. In fact, it's really the other way around. God, it's following the law that makes them a sinner.

[13:47] See verse 18, if I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. Paul's talking about the law.

If he rebuilds the law, goes back to trying to be justified by it, it would just show him to be a lawbreaker, because he can't keep it perfectly.

Just like with my friend's Buddhist colleague. So, trying to be justified by works actually makes us sinners, since because we can't keep it, it instead makes our failure clear to everyone.

This leads to his second defense in verse 19 and 20. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[14:53] Paul says in verse 19, through the law I died to the law. That is, through trying to keep the law, he realized he's a sinner, so he must die to the law and stop relying on it for salvation.

instead, he needs another way to be right with God, and that other way is Christ. See verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Christ's love for you and me meant he gave himself up for us at the cross.

We know this, and it's always incredible. So when Paul says he was crucified with Christ, he means his death counts as our death, his crucifixion as our crucifixion, his payment of sin counts as our payment of sin.

Just like when your football team wins, you say, we won, even though you just sat there and watched. Their win still counts as yours.

[16:12] Here, even though we do nothing to deserve it, Christ's death counts as our death for sin. We have been crucified with Christ.

And that means we have a new life. It's a new spiritual life with Christ who lives in us. We are now right with God because of faith alone in Christ, so we continue to live by faith alone in Christ.

And Paul's third defense is from verse 21 where he makes it really clear that we cannot be justified by works. Christ's death.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. If Christians rely on good works to be right with God, we are saying that Christ's death was a waste of time, that it achieved nothing for us, because we still have to add on our good works.

this means that even Peter in Antioch was by his actions proclaiming that Christ died for nothing.

[17:33] So trying to make ourselves right with God through good works means, as we've seen in 17 and 18, we'll just show ourselves to be sinners because we keep failing.

In 19 and 20, we'll return to the life we died to instead of the new life we have in Christ. And from 21, we'll be saying that Christ's death achieved nothing, because we still have to save ourselves with good works.

Do you see how wrong it is to try and justify ourselves before God with our good works? Now, if you're not a Christian, and this is new to you, I want to really challenge you to think about it for your own life.

Maybe you have been trying to live by good works, and maybe you've done quite well, except there's still a couple of things you regret doing, or that you struggled with, that you couldn't do. Or maybe your experience is the opposite. You found it so hard and so stressful that you just gave up, or thought about giving up. God. Maybe you realise, like Paul, that living by works is impossible. [18 : 52] If that's you, I really want to challenge you to consider the other way of being made right with God, that we are justified by faith in Christ. I encourage you to keep learning about Jesus from church and from the Bible, and keep asking questions.

You can ask me or Andrew after, or if somebody brought you along, you can ask them. What we've read today is the main point of Christianity, that we can be made right with God, or that we can't be made right with God or earn our way to heaven by doing good works, that instead it is by faith in Christ who gave himself for us at the cross.

This is why it's good news. Now for the Christians, for us who are justified by our faith in Christ, we have an encouragement and a challenge.

So first the encouragement. Our salvation doesn't depend on us. That's a huge relief. Are you relieved? I'm sure you're all nice people.

I've met some of you, but none of us are perfect. So if our salvation depended on how good we are, we'd be in big trouble, wouldn't we?

[20 : 17] I know I wouldn't stand a chance. But what a relief that it doesn't depend on us. That's also something we can continue to be thankful for, isn't it?

And to praise God that he sent his son Jesus to die for our sin, that by faith in him we can have life in him that is secure for all eternity.

And the challenge is this. Don't be a Peter from here. Elsewhere in the Bible, Peter is a great example of a disciple of Jesus.

But here, Peter added works of the law to his faith, which led to not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.

Here, he's a bad example. So don't be a Peter. Because of our sin, it's so easy to go back to thinking that we can be justified by the works we do.

[21 : 25] While they're not the same as the works Peter or the Galatians struggled with, it's the same idea. For example, we might start thinking that important religious works, like coming to church or having communion are the thing which saves us.

Now, while these are good and they're beneficial to us, and I'm glad you've come, they are not how we are justified. Or, we might begin to think that our assurance of being saved depends on doing good moral deeds.

again, doing good things for people is good. But, some Christians think it's because they're good that they will go to heaven.

They base their assurance on how good they are. Then, what if I mess up? What if I'm having a bad day? Or, I get angry at someone because I'm just really hungry.

what then? We would worry that we might not make it to heaven, that we fail to please God. Again, living rightly is good, but our assurance should be found only in Christ.

[22 : 50] The good work we do as Christians then comes after, because of Christ living in us. But our justification comes by faith alone in Christ and not our works or deeds.

It's just as our next hymn that we'll sing says, Nothing in my hand I bring, but simply to your cross I cling.

We are not saved by works, but simply by faith alone. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord God, our Father, I thank you for sending your son Jesus to die for us.

I thank you that our salvation doesn't depend on us. Help us to remember this, to praise you, and help us in our lives to remember to live in a way that does not depend on our good works for our salvation.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.