

# Always been by Faith, not Works

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[ 0 : 00 ] How does Christianity differ from not just other religions, but every other worldview? Now, there might be a few things to say here, but supremely, the answer is this.

We are justified by faith in Jesus and not in our works. We're justified by faith in Jesus and not in our works. We are counted right before God.

We have entry to heaven, not by any religious or moral performance of us, but because we trust in Jesus' death for us. I wonder if that's what you said. So the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu out there, they're all trying, they're all trusting in their own religious performance to get to God and ultimate reality.

Even the secularist, that is the average Melbourne atheist out there, is busy trying to earn their best life now through their own effort and moral performance.

Christianity is not just slightly different. It is totally opposite to every other worldview because we trust in Jesus' work and not our own.

[ 1 : 08 ] Now, if the people starting the course today, if they can grasp just that, they will have explored 90% of Christianity, I think. But in Galatians, in our passage, Galatians is also a church of seasoned believers.

They were going well. They had passed their Christianity Explored course ages ago. But now Paul writes them this very harsh letter because they had begun to desert the cross of Christ.

They were fooled into thinking they must be circumcised, which sounds a bit weird, doesn't it? It sounds strange on the surface. But underneath, it's the same issue as every other worldview.

The path to God is something that I can do. Some religious work, moral performance, good works. Paul says, verse 1, He says, How can you switch from the message that was preached and portrayed and taught to you?

You dear, stupid Christians. Now, Paul is talking to them. That's not me speaking to you. They were confused about circumcision.

[ 2 : 33 ] We are not. They are Galatians. We are Holy Trinity Doncaster. But if for a moment this were HTG, Holy Trinity Galatia, we might have some of the same issues.

Let me show you what I mean. If this were HTG, so the group over there, they would have cancelled all their holidays for the rest of their lives. You know why? Because they think they must be at church every single week as long as they live to be right with God.

The group at the back, they think you must be a member of a small group to feel like a Christian.

The group over here who sits at the front all the time we see you, they sit at the front because they think you must be the first to take communion.

Do you know why? Because if you take it first, it's purer. It doesn't have all the floaty bits that the people at the back enjoy. You see, these people at the front, they think pure communion wine, pure communion with God.

The group on that side, they don't get along with the group on that side because this group here think you must be baptized as an adult to be saved. But the group over here think, no, no, you must be baptized as a baby.

[ 3 : 45 ] And the group, just somewhere else, whoever I haven't pointed to, they always pester Andrew Price, our lead pastor, for Bible notes. Because they think you must not leave the house for that having done a Bible quiet time.

Otherwise, when you get to five o'clock, how will you know if you're still getting to heaven? Listen, HTG might easily be full of the same confusion, the same must-dos that this church in Galatia had. Now, perhaps you say, perhaps you say, look, I only ever trust in the cross of Christ. I only ever trust in Jesus. I've done Christianity Explored.

I would never be like them. Remember that even confident swimmers drown. This letter is a warning. You see, in chapter 1, it was such a possibility that Paul warned that if even he or an angel from heaven might preach a different gospel.

In chapter 2, this lie in the first place, it came from the first and great church in Jerusalem. And last week, even the apostle Peter, Jesus' best friend, who was there at the actual cross, even he had to be rebuked for going back to Jewish customs and religious laws.

[ 5 : 11 ] If it can happen to these champions of the faith, it can happen to us. If it can happen to this mature church in Galatia, it can happen to us. And I think that's because there must be something inherent to our sinful nature that always pulls away from the cross of Christ to our own works.

Maybe it's from our culture as well. So in Melbourne, we believe in being self-made, self-reliant, earning your own way. Maybe there's something in every person that turns good things into ultimate things, into must-dos for our salvation.

So last week, have a look at your Bibles, open your Bibles again. Chapter 2, verse 16, last week.

The whole point of last week was chapter 2, verse 16, right at the end.

Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. This week, four reasons why that's the case.

So last week, no one's going to be justified by works.

This week, four reasons why that's the case. Four reasons why the Muslim is wrong. Trying to keep the five pillars of Allah. Hoping that Allah will weigh him favourably.

[ 6 : 29 ] Four reasons why the Hindu is wrong. Constantly working for the right karma. Four reasons why the Catholic Church and some Anglicans are wrong.

Supplementing Jesus' work with some rights from the priest and good deeds. Four reasons why the secularist is wrong. Busy out there, achieving their best life now.

Today, we won't get to do all four reasons. We're only going to do three. I put the fourth one on your handout. You can ask me about that later. Today, three reasons why Christianity stands alone.

So reason one, look at your beginnings. Verse 2, chapter 3, verse 2. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by believing what you heard?

How did you start your Christian life? How did the Holy Spirit come into your life? Was your church attendance and speaking in tongues so good that God said, Well done you. Here's the Holy Spirit.

[ 7 : 29 ] You see, the Spirit is not some prize that God gives us for some second stage of Christianity. He is the gift that God gives us when we first hear and believe the gospel.

He's the guarantee of the new spiritual life we have in Christ. First, this is Christianity Explored level one. Paul says, remember how you all became Christians.

Verse 3, are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? What makes you think you can perfect your Christianity by switching paths and getting circumcised?

Verse 4, Paul warns it will make all your previous Christianity in vain. See, what we're talking about is salvation level consequences.

It will make your past Christianity in vain. No wonder he calls them fools a couple of times. Verse 5, so I ask again, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by works of the law or by believing what you heard?

[ 8 : 40 ] The answer is so obvious, says Paul. Why change paths? Now, for us here today, how did you become a Christian?

Was it, well, I got to a point where I realised my church attendance was so good, my understanding of the Bible was so good, and I looked around and thought, wow, I'm better than everyone else around me. I must be a Christian.

Is that how you began? Or was it you first heard and believed the message of Jesus' death for us?

To switch to another path makes all other things in vain.

If believing the message is what got us the Spirit in the first place, it must be the right way to go.

Anything else sells short the death of Jesus. You see, I think the problem is there are so many good things attached to Jesus.

So the church, Anglican denomination, the Baptists, getting baptised, the Lord's Supper, Bible reading, prayer, serving at church, good deeds in our community, all good things.

[ 9 : 50 ] But the warning of this passage is that after a while, maybe after decades and decades, we will start to trust in those good things and make them ultimate things.

Maybe we feel that Jesus' death, you know, the Good Friday story, maybe we feel it's just Christianity Explored, level one. It's just the ABCs, I'm well beyond that. Maybe that's how we think. That attitude undermines the cross. It says that what Jesus did was not enough. I don't know about you, but I love saying confession in the church.

It's the reason why we do it every fortnight, because I deliberately put it in there. I love doing it, and this is the reason why. I used to feel that I arrived at church only 50% a Christian, and until I made, you know, confession publicly like that.

You see, I used to think that during the week, I'd lose Christian points. So, laziness at work, minus a point. I didn't do a quiet time, minus a point. Argument with someone at home, minus a point.

[10:56] Over the speed limit, minus a few points. And I used to think I arrived at church with my Christianity looking like my driver's license, full of demerit points. But finally, when I got to church and got to confess, oh, finally, 100% a Christian again.

You know when the priest does their, in my old church, they used to do that sort of stuff, all that crazy stuff, and I think, 100% a Christian. Now, I can switch off during the sermon, minus a point. Or maybe I drove home, and I had to share the road with a cyclist, minus a lot of points. There's nothing wrong with confession in church.

It's one of the good things that we do. But when I trust in that, when I live my Christian life from confession to confession, when I'm not trusting in Jesus' blood once given for all time, I have switched paths from faith to works.

Paul says, verse 3, After beginning by means of the Spirit, why are you now trying to finish by means of your flesh? How foolish, he would say to me.

[12:06] Look at your beginnings. That's reason one. Reason two, look at Abraham's beginnings. Here is a tip. If you ever get into an argument, a religious argument, just start quoting Abraham.

Abraham is the father of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. He is the top trump, if you like. Just start quoting things about the life of Abraham, and you'll probably win the argument.

Verse 6, So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. That's a quote from Genesis 15, which Errol read for us.

That's our Old Testament reading. It says that Abraham was counted as right with God. Now, was it because Abraham was a really good moral man?

No. Two chapters earlier, he tried to sell his wife into slavery just to save his own skin. Was it because Abraham had a really unshakable faith? No.

[13:06] In the reading that we had, he doubted God's ability to give him a son. Was it because Abraham searched diligently for God in the ancient world? No.

God found Abraham. He took him outside. He showed him all the stars in the sky and said, Abraham, you will be the beginning of a whole new era of people, a new creation of blessings. Not by what he has done, but only by God's initiative, God's grace, if you like. You see, maybe the lie, maybe the lie going around Galatia was this.

Maybe, hey, if you really want to share in Abraham's blessings, you need to be circumcised because that's what all the men in his household had. Paul says, you dear stupid der brains.

Verse 7. Understand, understand then that those who have faith are the children of Abraham. Faith in God's promises, however shaky, is the mark of Abraham's family, not outward sort of circumcision.

[14:09] Some people think that God dealt with the Jews one way and deals with Christians another. There are some differences to be sure, but verse 8 and 9, the overwhelming sentiment is it's always been by faith, by believing God's promises.

Yeah, sure, Abraham never knew Jesus, his seed. Sure, we have a much greater perspective of God's plans, this side of history. But just as we believe in God's promises, so also with Abraham, he believed in God's promises, the gospel that was preached to him even back then.

The path of faith means that anyone can share in Abraham's blessings. You don't have to be Jewish, you don't have to be circumcised, even if you're Australian, even if you're from the bush or you're a townie, even if you're Chinese or Malaysian or Persian or you're Canadian or you're American or you're a half and half like me.

Everyone can share in God's blessings because the mark has always been by faith, by works of the law, by religious performance, no one will be justified.

Why? Just look at your own beginnings. It's reason one. Just look at Abraham's beginnings. It's reason two. And reason number three, because by works of the law, we will only be cursed. [15:39] So this is point three. I think it's still, is it still okay to say that we're in election season? Can I say that? Or we're probably over the whole thing. But anyway, if I can squeeze one more bit of juice out of it.

In keeping with the theme of politics, I don't know if you know this, but many US presidents are constantly harassed by claims of nepotism. Do you know what nepotism is? It's where you give your family members a job over the more qualified people. So Donald Trump gave his daughter a position somewhere in the West Wing, even though she may or may not have been the most qualified person.

It was quite shocking at the time. But no one comes close to President Ulysses S. Grant. He was a president a long time ago. He hired over 40 of his relatives to top positions in the cabinet. Now, of his 40 family members, quite a few of them had criminal records. And so do you know what he did? He just gave them presidential pardons and then put them in the White House. Now, I'm sure that there were other people more qualified than his family members to get those jobs who'd worked hard and had really good CVs.

[16:52] But there was no way they were getting in. Not while the president was there hiring his family members. Paul agrees. He says, no matter how hard you work, no matter how good your CV, it will not result in God saying, well done, good and faithful servant.

Come in. It won't. Rather, God will say, you are cursed. Isn't that striking? And it's not that works are evil.

It's not that we do bad things. It's that we fail to reach God's standard. Verse 10. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything.

Everything written in the book of the law. If we're going to rely on works, we better be perfect. We get it. We better keep all 10 of the commandments all the time. That's why verse 11 says, clearly, relying on the law for justification will not work.

There's nothing wrong with the law. Next week, Andrew Price will explain the role of the law.

There's nothing wrong with good works. It is good to be good. But when the standard of, when the law was handed down, the standard is there in verse 12.

[18:09] The person who does these things will live by them. If my living with God depends on me doing these things, that is keeping the law, that path will lead to curses.

because God's standard is too high. Verse 10, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse because cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

Religious works, good deeds, they are fine. They are all part of a godly life. But as a path to justification, completely hopeless, they only bring curses.

The election last week told us that the big problem in the world was climate change. I don't know if that's true or not. But actually, this is the problem right here.

Here it is. This is the problem. God cannot call us right on judgment day. His standard is too high. And of course, that means we have all fallen short.

[19:14] But Paul's gospel says this, verse 13. Have a look at verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

How did that happen? When did that happen? Paul says, simple, when he was hung on a pole at the cross. Paul says, your own Jewish scriptures, in your own Jewish scriptures, it is written, verse 13, cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.

You see, one of the big problems with Jewish evangelism is not Jesus per se, it's his cross. How can he be the Jewish Messiah?

How can he be the one from whom all of Abraham's blessings flow? Our law says that anyone who dies like that is not precious to God, but cursed by God.

The Jewish heretics that came down from Jerusalem in this letter, they all scorn the cross as well. And actually, they're no different from every other path in the world, all scorning the cross of Christ.

[20:24] How can Jesus' death be the path to life? How can his defeat be your victory? How can his weakness be your power? It's too humiliating, too insignificant, too local, too ancient.

Level one Christianity explored says that Jesus wasn't cursed for his unfittedness to be God's king. He wasn't cursed for his moral failures, but for ours.

He becomes the curse that all our religious performance inevitably leads to. And so trusting in his death gives the Christian a hope that no other worldview has.

For the Muslim out there trying hard to keep the five pillars hoping that Allah will find you good on that day. He won't unless he's got dodgy scales, unless he uses a lesser measurement than the God of Abraham.

For the Hindu, trying to improve their karma, unless you're perfect all the time, you won't achieve ultimate reality. For the Anglican and the Catholics, if you're hoping that going to church, saying your prayers, loving your neighbour as yourself, will do the trick, it won't.

[ 21 : 44 ] Remember, the standard is doing it all the time and for the Jew, busy keeping God's law. It's good to be good, but as a path to justification, Paul says you're now on a path that leads to curses.

This is level one Christianity explored. The unique claim of Christianity is verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Where? When? How did that happen? Simple. When he was hung on a pole, on the cross. Here is a letter written to a mature church who were going well.

They were fooled into thinking they could switch paths. Paul warns them, don't sell short Christ crucified. We are a mature church.

We are going well. Our temptation will always be to add some of those good things attached to Christianity, to trust in them, to feel more right, more secure with God, more confident in heaven.

[ 22 : 57 ] Here is Paul's salvation level warning. Don't join this church of fools. don't sell Jesus short by moving from faith to any of these things, however good they seem.

Faith was the path we began with. It was the path that has always been since Abraham. Every other path only leads to curses.

Should I pray that we would stay on the path? Why don't we do that? Father God, we are so grateful for the cross of Christ, that Jesus redeemed us from the curses that we deserve, that he became a curse for us.

And Father, we are always prone to wander, to trust in good things, to feel more right and secure with you. Please help us, Father, even if we've been Christians for decades and decades, not to move past the cross.

Please would we trust in Jesus' death alone, in his work and not ours. Please guard our hearts from trusting in our own performance. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[ 24 : 17 ] Amen. Amen.