

Always by Grace

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[0 : 00] Now, many years ago, I drove to Yass to visit my sister, who had recently got married, and I took along with me a little friend who had been my sister's flower girl.

Now, Michelle would have been in late primary school at the time, and my sister worked in Canberra, which is a little distance from Yass, and I volunteered to drive her to work, and the plan was that Michelle and I would have time in Canberra doing really wonderful things together.

Now, this was my first trip to Canberra, and I really didn't know where I was going, and I also had this huge responsibility of looking after this young companion of mine.

Now, for those of you who know Canberra, there are these really, really large roundabouts in Canberra, and when I say large, they go all around Parliament House, and if I remember correctly, there's two layers, but I'm not absolutely certain, but I just know that they're big, and they go around in a circle.

And so, you need to know where you are going when you go to Canberra. You need to know which exit to get off to get to the place that you're going, and unfortunately, I didn't know that piece of information.

[1 : 42] So, I spent a lot of time going around and around and around and around, not knowing which exit was the one I was needing to get off to take my little companion for a fun day.

Now, my little companion was more and more distressed, distressed because she saw the same things over and over and over again.

When I say distressed, she was in tears and telling me I want to go home. So, we were really not in a good place at that moment in time. But in Galatians, it's a little bit like going around on a roundabout because we seem to be seeing the same message over and over again, and yet, it's a message that we too forget over and over as well.

So, we need to try and set a new pattern, I think. Now, Paul's concentration and his central concern here is that he wants the Galatians to be right with God.

This is of grave importance to Paul, and it's of grave importance to us as well, that we also know that we are right with God.

[3 : 15] We already know from previous sermons that Paul is combating the issue that there are Jewish Christians who are telling the Gentile Christians that to be saved, they first have to believe Jesus, then they obey a whole bunch of the laws, and then they are saved.

And Paul's reminding them that what has to happen is that you believe Jesus, and then you're saved, and then you go on obeying God.

Now, the law, being all the rules, all the regulations that we've spoken of over the last few weeks, the food restrictions, circumcision, ceremonial ways of doing worship.

So, let's today think of three things. Now, for my community group people who like to have three points, here's your three points.

The three points are going to be, and mind you, it is only three points because the passage actually does this for us very neatly. What we're going to look at is what is the gospel from verses 10 to 14?

[4 : 33] What is Paul asking of the Galatians in verses 1 to 5? And what witness does Paul bring in to give us in verses 6 to 9?

So, what's the gospel in verses 10 to 14? Well, scripture tells us it's all about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, that we will be saved if we believe in him.

We are justified, that is, we are made right with God, and we are no longer condemned. We receive this through grace if we believe in him.

That's what all of the Bible keeps telling us. And it seems so simple to believe in Jesus. But the Galatians were being encouraged to believe that it wasn't enough.

And we too fall into that same trap of thinking that it cannot be that simple. You see, doing good is a natural default setting for all humans.

[5 : 43] Many believe that God will love you more if you are busy doing good things, or that by doing good things, that's the way that you get to God.

It's either about your place in heaven or God loving you. Now, remember in the first sermon that Sam did on this Galatians, he mentioned the two diagnostic questions that Evangelism Explosion talks about.

The first one being, if you were to die tonight, where would you wake up? And the second one being, if you were to die and you wake up in heaven and God says to you, why should I let you into my kingdom, what would you say?

Now, I've been around using those two questions in actual fact for many years, for about 40 years. I have used those same questions.

And I can tell you there is a massive percentage of answers that I have received over the years that most people would actually say, well, I've actually been pretty good and I've tried to do the right thing.

[6 : 53] And, you know, and it's about how good I have been as a person. And that comes from Christian people too, let me say. So we all fall into this trap that we're talking about today.

Now, the law or obedience to the law won't get you to God and doing good deeds for salvation won't get you to God either.

Why is that? Well, verse 10 says, For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. As it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything that is written in the book of the law.

Now, those who live by the law, who are relying on their obedience to the law, their own moral achievements to make them right with God are under a curse.

And it is as bad as it sounds. It means devoted to damnation or devoted to destruction.

[8 : 08] And Paul is saying the very law that you Galatians are looking to to make you right with God actually teaches that you are in big, big trouble.

So Paul is warning them, do not do it. Verses 11 to 12 says, Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God because the righteous will live by faith.

The law is not based on faith. On the contrary, it says, the person who does these things will live by them. Obeying the law can't do enough to save you.

Notice Paul assumes that they're going to fail in this. And he points out that it has always been God's intention from the beginning that one is saved by faith.

Faith is about trust. It's about entrusting yourself to another. So he's saying we are only made righteous, we are only rescued from the curse and God's wrath through putting our faith in the one who has perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the will of God.

[9 : 34] That is Jesus Christ. Think about it. Jesus is the only one who has never been under a curse and Paul is saying that's where you look.

You look to Jesus. That's where you put your faith. If you put your faith in him, you will be forgiven of your sins. You will be declared innocent by God.

You will be made right with God. The curse will be lifted. But the question comes how. How is putting my faith in this man Jesus going to save me and do what the law cannot do?

And Paul tells us in verse 13, excuse me, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. Now friends, as I look around the room, there should be great smiles on your faces because this is the best news ever.

[10 : 47] This is the message of the Christian faith. This is what God is inviting you to believe and to be saved by. How did he do it? He did it by going to a tree, by going to the cross, by being crucified.

After having lived a sinless life, he did this to ransom us. On the cross, he became our substitute. He took our place. He made atonement. He made payment for the debt that we owed God. He substituted himself and paid what we could not pay.

Being crucified is horrific. But what is worse and what is more scandalous is the wrath of God that was put on Jesus instead of putting it on us.

God did not withhold anything. Jesus redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse for us. And do you know what is quite stunning here?

[12:04] If we put our faith in Christ to save us in the same supernatural way, he takes away our sin and the eternal punishment we deserve because we've disobeyed him.

He gives us his righteousness. He gives us his moral perfection so we are declared as seen as innocent before God the Father.

He doesn't just take away our sins. That would be enough. He then gives us his perfect record. The one who obeyed perfectly says, now what I've done, it's as if you have done it.

If you put your faith in me. He clothes us with robes of righteousness. Now Athanasius, who is one of the early church fathers in the fourth century, he called this the glorious exchange.

That Christ, the Son of God, got the punishment and took the punishment of an enemy of God so we, who are the enemies of God, could receive blessings of sons and daughters of God.

[13:26] It's the glorious exchange that occurs. Believing in this, putting your hope in this and living by this is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

So the gospel that Paul taught the Galatians was one of grace. It has always been and it always will be about grace.

Now, having seen what the gospel is, what does Paul ask of the Galatians in verses one to five? He says this, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard?

Are you so foolish? After beginning by the means of the spirit, are you now trying to finish by the means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain, if it really was in vain?

[14:44] So again, I ask you, does God give you his spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the works of the law or by what you heard? So many questions in that one paragraph.

So much concern from Paul to the Galatians. So brash was Paul that he calls the Galatians, whom he loves, he calls them fools.

Now we've already seen what Paul had taught the Galatians, that the gospel is by grace alone through faith alone. But there's an important premise that Paul is pointing out here.

That is, once you have become a Christian, how do you then move ahead? Did you see that? He says, after beginning by the means of the spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? So the way you become, the way you come into faith is exactly the same way that you advance in the Christian faith.

[15:58] We don't change the message. Remember the two orders that Steve mentioned last week and I mentioned right at the beginning of this. There's a religious order that says that you start with belief in Jesus, you obey the commandments and then you are saved.

This isn't a gospel at all. And then there is the gospel order that says that you believe in Jesus, you are saved and then you obey and you follow Jesus.

the Galatians had it back to front and are being reminded to remember what they had first heard.

But let me remind you, we are not saved to then just please ourselves. Ephesians 2.10 says, for we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

One of our core values here at St. Paul's is servant, to be servant-hearted, servant leadership. That isn't because we just want to fill rosters, let me tell you.

[17:15] it's because it sends a message and the message is all about your heart. It's about our heart when we want to serve.

It tells us something of what is going on within you. Now what is fascinating in our Galatians verses is that Paul reminds them that it was before their very eyes that they saw Jesus crucified.

But we know that that wasn't the case at all. The Galatians didn't see physically the crucifixion of Jesus. But the interesting thing is what the Bible does, the Bible actually uses sensory language.

And the Bible uses it. Once you've actually got the intellectual knowledge, it then, that intellectual knowledge and Steve mentioned this in different words last week, it needs to become heart.

But it becomes a heart belief and then the Bible uses a sensory language when it becomes a heart belief. It's so real and it's so vivid that it's as if you were personally there at the crucifixion witnessing what Jesus was doing for them personally and for us personally as well.

[18 : 42] Hence the sensory language. Another example of this sensory language is in Ephesians 118 where Paul actually says, I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

Paul wants the Ephesians here to know the hope of the gospel that it doesn't just remain a concept but it becomes a heart truth.

so it's the eyes of their heart seeing something from the heart. Now how does one become a Christian? You get the facts, you trust and have faith, that is believe and you become righteous. God sees Jesus in us. Now Paul is pointing out that when the Galatians became Christians they stopped relying on the law and they trusted God would accept them.

That's what happened at the beginning and God gives his spirit not because you observe the law but because you believe and the gift of the spirit then leads you through life and how you then obey God.

[19 : 53] you don't get into faith and then you turn around and you try really really hard to stay in the faith.

That then would be no gospel at all. Remember verse 10 says that we covered if you want to continue in keeping the law then you are under a curse.

So what is Paul asking of the Galatians? He's asking them to remember remember the gospel remember the freedom in Christ remember as if you have just become a Christian today remember the joy remember what you saw when the scales dropped from your eyes remember co-remembers the moment when they were singing a particular song alternatively so just remember if and if you are here today and you cannot remember a time when the gospel came alive to you then just maybe you've never really understood it at all so today could be your day see taste hear all the words that

Galatians is saying to us today alternatively if you are here today and you give agreement to the life of Jesus you know something of there was a death and a resurrection but you are choosing to live life as you wish to ordain your days your way then let me tell you this you have not believed the gospel at all if you are doing that just believing God and knowing that there is a God is not enough in James 2 19 it says you believe that there is one God good even the demons believe that and they shudder so verse 5 says that God gives us his spirit it doesn't say that

God gave his spirit it's not a once only action it's a continuous action we continually need to believe and have faith we can still struggle in life but in every area of our life we want to appropriate the gospel message and become like Jesus it won't happen completely until Jesus returns but we need to be continually repenting and moving toward Jesus allowing Jesus and his spirit to actually work on us and change us to be like Jesus and struggles come in many different ways sometimes it will be our pride fears jealousy envy bitterness and unforgiving spirit anger both passive and aggressive and many many more instead of just hoping that God will remove them or simply exercising willpower against them we might be should be asking ourselves what do I wrongly believe in what do

[23 : 43] I wrongly believe is being held withheld in order for me to feel complete for me to feel as if I have hope to be a person of worth what is it that I'm wrongly believing in for that to occur we might be wanting comfort above all things and someone has made our lives harder we might be worshipping other people's approval but let me tell you comfort and control and approval and many many other things they are functional saviours and when they are blocked we get bitter only when we set our eyes on Jesus for our everything and say there is no better way in life than Jesus will we move ahead and start the journey of becoming like him it will only be when we say

Jesus is our everything we fail in this journey because we forget what we heard just like the Galatians had forgotten what they had heard so what is Paul asking the Galatians to do he's asking them to remember the gospel and to walk in obedience we all need to preach that gospel to ourselves day by day as well now we've seen what the gospel is and we've seen what Paul has asked of the Galatians now for his argument here in this letter he has this master stroke to bring in a witness of one who lived by faith and was credited to him as righteous and who is this person verse 6 says consider Abraham Abraham who was way back not in the

New Testament but right at the very beginning of the Bible Abraham is the witness he's going to call in Abraham no less by using Abraham Paul will show these Gentiles why they have been bewitched so from Genesis chapter 12 1 to 3 it says the father of Jews is Abraham the people of Israel began when God promised Israel's ancestor Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation living in a God given land and blessed by God this is a man who lived 430 years before the

law that the Galatians are being told that they have to actually obey before that law was even given verse 6 says just as

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness being credited being an accounting term that means to confer a status or a status on something that wasn't there before so what does it mean that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness of course faith in God's word and promise results in righteousness if we believe God exists and that we owe him our obedience and worship then out of that will flow righteous living but here we have something more when the Bible tells us that God credits Abraham's faith as righteous it means that God is treating Abraham as if he were living a righteous life the lesson here is that when someone is credited righteous by God he is conferring this legal status on him he treats them as actually righteous and free from condemnation even though they are still unrighteous in their heart and behaviour they have not been made perfect at this stage but they are justified

Paul and Abraham are showing that it is possible to be loved and accepted by God while we ourselves are still sinful and imperfect and we know from scripture that Abraham made some really foolish mistakes and decisions whilst waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled so here in Galatians Paul is saying to do what Abraham did first believe the gospel message believe God and second have faith in God's provision not in our performance live knowing that God provides what else does Abraham teach the Galatians and us we are spiritual children of Abraham we become part of a spiritual family of Abraham by faith the gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham and it echoes all the way into eternity from the beginning of the

[29 : 20] Bible to the very end of the Bible is this whole story so ultimately the good news in the Old Testament is the good news of Jesus Christ and this gospel message is for the nations we have a global God and a global message Abraham has much to say to us here in Galatians but we'll hear a lot more about Abraham next week so what have we covered we've seen the glorious exchange that is the gospel message we've been told to remember this gospel message remember remember when Christ came to you and we have shared in the witness of Abraham clarifying that it is through faith that one is saved and made righteous men can