

True Gospel, True Freedom

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[0 : 0 0] So, how did I do? Did I do well enough? Did I do enough? These are questions that we ask pretty often. A couple of weeks ago, the scores came out for one of my essays, and I was too scared to check.

I waited, and I eventually checked only when someone told me that if I'd failed, I would have a limited time to resubmit. I was even more scared.

It's a scary question. Did I pass or did I fail? And it's not just school. We ask the same thing every day or every time we go to a job interview or if we submit a report or a proposal at work, if we cook something for the first time or a first date.

But we also feel this way about our lives. Am I holy enough? Did I live well enough? Maybe I won't make it to heaven. In our passage today, Paul's going to be showing us how the gospel answers our doubts, and he's going to build on the arguments he made two weeks ago.

So, Paul's main argument is from chapter 2, verse 16. It's right there in your Bibles, just across the page. So, have a look. Let's read it.

[1 : 2 1] Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not the works of the law.

Because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. So, Paul's main argument is that we're saved by faith and not works. And in our passage today, Paul has three main reasons why that's still going to be the case.

So, let's look at the first reason. The first point, Paul's first reason is an appeal to the Galatians' own experience. It's point one on your outlines.

Let's start by reading verses 1 to 3. Paul's getting emotional.

He's calling them fools. But it's only because he cares about them. When he calls them foolish, remember, he's not saying they're stupid. They are fools for being deceived so easily and for forgetting their own experience of when they became Christians.

[2 : 5 3] So, when Paul talks about receiving the Spirit in verse 2, he's talking about becoming a Christian. Paul is saying, did you become a Christian because of what you did or by believing in Jesus?

Were you living your Christian life through faith or relying on laws? It was faith in Jesus, I hope. And why should it change now?

It shouldn't change. And Paul's not only talking about becoming a Christian. He's also talking about continuing as a Christian. So, have a look at verse 4.

Have you experienced so much in vain, if it really was in vain? So, again, I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

Now, we don't know exactly what they experienced or the miracles that they saw. But Paul is clearly talking about things that happened as they continued to put their faith in Christ and as they live as Christians.

[3 : 56] And not just the moment of their conversion. Since they experienced so much, isn't that evidence that they had the true gospel, both in becoming and in continuing as a Christian?

Paul's reason here is that their experience of becoming and of continuing as a Christian is by faith in Christ. And I know this too from my own experience.

When I became a Christian, I was pretty young. I was probably about year 7 or so. And now, was it because I was super holy as a year 7?

No, I was a stupid kid. Even as a stupid kid, God helped me to understand that Jesus died for my sins and that he forgives those who believe that I was saved through faith and not works.

I didn't even tidy my room or listen to my mum. It couldn't be works. It was only by faith. And if God doesn't change, which he doesn't, then of course it's still the case now.

[5 : 04] And it's not just me either. So if any of you are Christians, then it would be your experience too. I don't know everything you've experienced, but I can be fairly sure that when you became a Christian, it was because you believed in Jesus and not by being good or doing good works.

So if that was true then, it's still true now. Your own Christian life is evidence that we are saved by faith.

This is Paul's first reason. Our own experience of becoming a Christian shows that we're saved by faith and not works. Paul's second reason for faith and not works is based on scripture.

And it's our second point. He starts with Abraham, whom we heard about in the first reading. See verses 6 to 9. Let's read.

Now what is righteous?

[6 : 44] Righteous means being right according to God. Abraham didn't have God's law. And in fact, he still sinned. Even after he was called, he still sinned, as we all do.

But it was because of his faith that God declared him right with him. And it's also the same for us. See in verse 9 again, those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

In other words, we are also declared righteous only because of faith, not works. Now you want to hear about works. So Paul goes on to talk about works in 10 to 12.

So read with me from 10. There are three points here.

First, in verse 11, the Old Testament says that the righteous will live by faith. It's always been that way. It's always been by faith.

[8 : 08] Second, in verse 12, the law is not about faith. There are two different ways. Works are a different way from faith.

Now if you want to live by works of the law, then you have to keep the whole law. In other words, you have to do all of the law to be righteous. But third, the third one, we know that no one has kept the whole law.

This means that from verse 10, we're all under a curse. As it says, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

If you rely on the law to be saved and you can't keep every bit of it, you fail. It's like it's a test with a 100% pass mark.

But for all of us, we got the first question wrong. It doesn't matter how hard you work at the rest of the law. We're cursed because we can't keep it all. But the great news is, Jesus has taken that curse for us, in our place.

[9 : 13] That's what Paul means in verses 13 and 14. Have a look. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it's written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Christ was the only person who ever kept the whole law. The only one who's not under a curse. But Paul, again, appeals from the scriptures that anyone who hung on a pole is cursed.

And what do we know about Jesus? He hung on a pole or on a cross. Paul's point here is that by hanging on the pole or the cross, Jesus becomes cursed in our place.

Jesus takes the curse instead of us. And by doing so, he redeems us and saves us from it. Why did Jesus do this? He redeemed us so that the blessing of salvation or righteousness might come to us Gentiles too.

[10 : 26] And not just salvation, also the promised Holy Spirit. So Paul's shown his second reason. This time an appeal to God's word in the scriptures that God said from the start, righteousness comes from faith, not works.

We're blessed with salvation by faith, just like Abraham, for it's by faith in Jesus that we're redeemed from the curse of not keeping the law. And now we get to Paul's third piece of evidence, or reason why salvation is by faith and not works.

It's the third point on your outlines, and it's an appeal to logic and to wisdom. Let's read from 15. Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life.

Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ. What I mean is this, the law introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God, and thus do away with the promise.

[11 : 45] For if the inheritance depends on the law, it no longer depends on the promise. But God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. There's a bit to unpack here.

Let's start with the example in verse 15. No one can set aside or add to a human covenant that's been duly established. The closest thing these days that we have to a covenant is probably a marriage.

So imagine a couple who get married. It shouldn't be hard to imagine. There's been a few in this church recently. There was one yesterday from the Chinese congregation.

So the couple, they make their vows. They make their promises at the wedding. And this is the covenant. Now imagine later on, the husband makes additional promises, or another covenant to his wife.

Like, for example, he promises to take out the bins every week. So does this new covenant replace the original covenant on his wedding day?

[12 : 52] If he forgets one week, or if he's unable to take the bins out, does that mean they're no longer married? No? No? Of course not. I can't worry.

No. The original promises and the original covenant haven't changed. Or, what if they move to a new apartment in a tall building, and there's one of those rubbish chutes in the wall.

You know, the rubbish falls to the bottom, and then someone is paid each week to come and collect all the rubbish. The husband never has to take the bins out ever again. Does that mean the marriage is over?

No. I know it's a dumb example, but Paul needs to say it. The issue that he's defending in chapter 2 was the Galatians were being told to follow Jewish customs, which means relying on faith and works of the law for them to be justified.

But remember, Paul is saying, we are saved by faith, not works. Now, those people telling them this, they probably would have said, sure, Abraham was justified by his faith, but then the law came after, and it replaced it as something more important.

[14 : 08] So, for all this talk that Paul does about Abraham, and as you've seen, it's a lot, they're not going to listen until he shows them that Abraham's still relevant, that the law didn't replace the covenant with Abraham.

This is why he's talking about covenants and promises. So, to have a look, have a look at verse 16. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ. That is, the original covenant made with Abraham, God made with Abraham, was always looking towards and was always about Jesus the whole time.

It didn't change, it didn't go anywhere, when God made other promises later on in Israel's history. And see again in 17, the law introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God, and thus do away with the promise.

So, just like taking the bins out, the agreement that Israel made with God to follow the law, doesn't replace or get rid of the vows that God first made with Abraham.

[15 : 28] It doesn't destroy God's original promises, if they failed to keep the law, which they did, and we all do. So, in verse 18, Paul shows which covenant was the more important one.

If the inheritance depends on the law, it no longer depends on the promise. But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise. It can only be one or the other, law or promise.

But the initial covenant was based on promise. And because of God's grace to Abraham, and to the Galatians, and to us. So, this is Paul's third reason.

An appeal to common sense, to how God's covenants work. And to show that God doesn't change the way he relates to people, and that his original promise, justification by faith, has always been his way.

It didn't stop being his way, as we see from Abraham, to Jesus, and on to us. So, what does it mean for us? Paul's been building this argument for this statement that he made in chapter 2.

[16 : 39] We're not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Christ. He's not just explaining why it's true, but also why it's important. If you're here tonight, and you've been trying to live your life to be good enough, to follow all kinds of laws, to please God, because you're going to try to enter heaven, or something similar to heaven, let Paul's words sink in.

We are cursed, because no one is good enough. No one is perfect. No one can keep God's law all the time. But, as we've seen, the great news is Jesus has taken the curse for us at the cross, or on the pole.

So, all we need to do, to be made right with God, is to have faith in Christ. Have you put your faith in Christ? If you want to ask more, or talk more about this, please talk to me, or to Andrew, or to whoever brought you tonight, after the service.

We'd be happy to talk. But what about for everyone else? For those who've put our faith in Christ already, we have freedom. What do I mean?

We have freedom from the burden of having to keep the whole law, to be right with God. We have freedom from the guilt when we don't. And we have freedom from the fear that we haven't done enough to be saved.

[18 : 09] A few years ago, I finally got my driver's license. It took me a long time. I didn't get it until I was 21. Before that, I had to rely on public transport, or on people giving me lifts.

It was a burden. Sometimes I wanted to go somewhere, and I just couldn't. I was stuck. I was unable to do what I knew I needed to do. Then I got my license.

And with it, I got freedom. I could drive anywhere I wanted. I could give people lifts. I was free from the fear of not missing out. Free from the guilt of not being able to make it places.

It was so liberating. So freeing. Now, I know this is a silly example, but as Christians, we're made right with God by faith in Christ, and not by works.

So in the same way, we're free from the burden of relying on our good works to make us right. And this means we're free from the guilt when we mess up, for we have forgiveness whenever we ask for it.

[19 : 17] We're free from worrying about our salvation, because it no longer depends on our good works, but on our faith in Christ. It's so liberating, but so easy to forget.

We can take it for granted, or we can fall back into relying on works for assurance. For example, this is one example. When I was younger, I grew up in a church where I thought communion, or the Lord's Supper, which we'll do next week, I thought it made us right with God.

So I got worried, and I hoped that when God came back, he'd come on a Sunday afternoon, after we've had communion. That way I'd be okay. That's a burden.

It's pretty obvious, and it may not be the same for you, but it will be something for everyone. When we started, we started by asking ourselves, when do we ask ourselves questions like, did I do well?

Did I pass or fail? Am I good enough? And so these are the kinds of questions that I'm talking about. Maybe for you, it's going to be, is my Christian life good enough?

[20 : 34] Do I pray enough? Do I read the Bible enough? Am I as godly as that person? Or that person? Maybe it's guilt. For you.

Maybe it's, I got angry again. I lied again. I drank too much. I always get jealous of this person. I keep wasting time at work. I thought thoughts that I knew I shouldn't.

I don't know what it is for you. But when we do this, when we start to think it depends on us, we're falling back into relying on works of the law for our assurance, rather than our faith in Christ.

We're giving up that freedom. So, remember, we have been set free from relying on our works, and instead, we're saved by faith in Christ.

Now, of course, freedom doesn't mean do whatever you want, no worries. Paul will talk about this when we get to halfway through chapter 5. But how we live should come from being thankful to God for saving us and the assurance that He will save us simply because we have faith in Christ.

[21 : 50] How gracious of God is that? So, don't give up your freedom by relying on works. Instead, thank God for freedom that we have in Christ.

The freedom from relying on our good works to get us right, the guilt when we mess up, and freedom from the doubt of whether we'll make it to heaven. And give thanks to God who has and who will graciously save us simply because of our faith in Christ.

Let's pray. God, our Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to graciously save us from sin.

Thank you for the freedom that you've given us from needing to follow the law and from guilt. Please help us to remember that our salvation is assured because of your grace and not us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.