

Galatians 2:15-21. Sunday 29SEP24. God's Gospel of Freedom Defended. (Gal #4).

PRAY, read v15,16.

▲ “Will the defendant please stand”. The case has been heard, the deliberation is over, all that remains is the verdict. You rise to your feet in the dock, with a bead of sweat gathering on your forehead, knowing that the Judge before you is about to pronounce an outcome that will determine the shape of the rest of your life. What will it be?
Guilty, or not guilty?

When it comes to our standing in God's court there is no doubt that we have broken his laws, and we are in the wrong. What we deserve is an eternal sentence. Is there now any way that we can justly be declared **not guilty** even though we are guilty, or to use the terminology that Paul uses here in Galatians 2 is there any way that we can be *justified*- put in the right with God, even though we are in the wrong?

Well, yes wonderfully so. And this is the best news in the world. But only if you take the right road. In the 2 verses I've just read out, Paul makes a very clear contrast between 2 whole different systems by which a person seeks to be put right with God, and with absolutely crystal clarity, he spells out three times that one has absolutely no value in getting us justified (**works** of the law) and the other is absolutely effective in getting us right with God (**faith** in Jesus). V16.

In summary what we are going to see in these verses today is that:

We are put right with God by relying on Jesus' work and not by relying on our work. x2.

Well we will come back to this in a minute, but let me remind you where we have come to so far in the letter of Galatians.

Our first sermon was entitled God's Gospel of freedom...Deserted, and we saw in 1:6 the shocking news that the Galatians were leaving behind the true message of Christianity- the message of free forgiveness. (1:6).

The second sermon was entitled God's gospel of freedom...Demonstrated, and we saw 3 episodes in Paul's career that proved that his message was not his own invention, but that it came directly from God. (1:11). So by abandoning Paul's message the Galatians were abandoning God's message.

Last week we looked at a further episode in Paul's life (2:11-14) when God's gospel of freedom was...denied. Peter of all people had taken a tiny step that marked a giant leap away from true Christianity. He had by implication added works of the law to the gospel of grace, he was subtly demanding that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be full Christians. So Paul stood up to oppose him (2:11).

Well there have been a number of lessons that we have learnt already for our own lives: 1) it is easier than we think to add rules to the gospel of grace. 2) we do so at our peril, for when you abandon the gospel of God, you abandon the God of the gospel. 3) There are times when you have to stand up and call a spade a spade, and oppose someone because their teaching or their actions undermine the gospel.

But this morning we really go to the heart of **why** the gospel (the good news), is such good news, as Paul **defends** God's gospel of freedom, and we have 1 point and 3 subpoints.

The main point, as we've already seen is: **We are put right with God by relying on Jesus' work and not by relying on our work.**

If you want the theological name for this concept it's Justification by Faith alone. It was the storm at the centre of the Reformation in the 16th Century that split the protestant church (like us) away from the Catholic Church.

JUSTIFICATION= put right with God

BY FAITH= relying on Jesus' work

ALONE= not by a mix of our work and Jesus'.

Today we take communion, but taking communion doesn't contribute to putting us right with God, the Jesus who it points to does. Next week we have a baptism, baptism doesn't save us, the reality that baptism signifies saves us- washing by Jesus. Next week we have a confirmation- not a work to get us to God, but a strengthening (confirmation) of faith in Jesus. Sadly the medieval church had lost grace and were relying on a mix of their works and Jesus, (and tragically it's still enshrined in RC dogma to this day).

But before we dig in, in case you are worried that this is going to be a bit technical or dry and dusty. This truth is absolutely liberating, thrilling, wonderful, at the heart of the gospel and by the end of the service I hope we are going to be dancing in the aisles. (Rediscovering joy)

So let's see first that this is...

1) A NON- NEGOTIABLE TRUTH v15-16

So this contrast- will we depend on **our own** works (for the Galatians, their own keeping of the Jewish Law, and perhaps for them 3 particular parts of it- circumcision, food laws and following the Jewish calendar) or will we depend on Jesus' works alone for us on the cross. That's the contrast before us tonight, will we trust **our works** or **Jesus' works**?

Well, as we've seen, in categorical terms Paul makes abundantly clear, that we must trust in Jesus' works and not our works. Look how he builds through the verse 3 times from **general** (v16a a person) to **personal** (v16b we also) to the **universal** at the end (v16c NO ONE). **v15-16**

Allow me to continue my courtroom drama, and I hope it will illustrate this point.

▲ The judge brings down his hammer as you stand in the dock, and the verdict on you is GUILTY. It's both what you feared and you knew would happen, because it is true. You drove through the speed camera, through 3 red lights, caused a high police speed chase across Huntingdon, knocking over pedestrians along the way, committed 83 traffic offences and you are **guilty**. The penalty is a sentence in prison or a huge fine that you know that you could never pay.

But then bizarrely before you leave the dock, in an unprecedented act never seen before in a court just as the police handcuff you to take you away, the Judge says, no take me, we'll swap places. He can take my not guilty place and I'll pay for his crime, and he gets out his chequebook.

Well this is amazing- the judge would be paying for the legal debt that stands against you. It would be fully extinguished in your place. You would be in the right now, and would be able to walk out of the court a free person.

But in a second unprecedented act never seen before in a court, you say to the Judge. “No Judge, that is kind, but I have another plan, I am personally going to obey every speeding and traffic law from now on for the rest of my life, in the hope that I can be not guilty of my crime.”

Well are you stupid or what? A whole lifetime of traffic obedience in the future will not be able to atone for your 83 traffic offences in the past, but the judge is offering to pay the lot in one fell swoop.

Well excuse the very imperfect analogy, but I hope it goes some way to explain why the Galatians were being so foolish. There is no way that you can be “not-guilty” by law keeping (you are already guilty), but there is a perfect way to be “not-guilty” when someone else pays for you, and Jesus has paid, by taking our punishment on his own back on the cross.

There is a redeemer (rescuer), Jesus, God’s own Son. Precious lamb of God Messiah, holy One!

Jesus did enough work to put me and you in the right before God.

And that is non-negotiable. Don’t move from it.

☞ Some will never have truly grasped this non-negotiable truth before, even though they have been to church a million times, yet you’ve simply never heard it put like this. **xI**. At the moment your confidence before God is in the stuff you do. For you Jesus is like a walking stick for a healthy man. It’s just for show- you don’t actually lean on it, and you swing it around from time to time. But now you must lean fully on Jesus and him alone with your whole weight upon him. In the words of vI6 we need to “believe in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law”.

☞ But the tragedy in this passage (as we saw last week) is that a really mature Christian, Peter himself, one of Jesus’ apostles was departing from grace to law. And if the NIV is right to continue the speech marks, Paul is saying to Peter, look Peter, we know this. Originally we were living like we are superior to the Gentile sinners (the non-Jews) but we’ve turned our back on that. We know that a person is not justified by works of the law.

So why are you going back to it Peter?

The temptation of all of us is to think that we can somehow do something to please God. That soundness of theology, or serving in church, can just put us ahead of the next person in our standing with God.

That’s an insult to what Jesus did and it’s an insult to the person next to us, who is saved by grace, not by works as we are! Wonderfully, Christ has done it all! He has paid the punishment. You are justified.

This is an non-negotiable truth. Secondly this is an honourable truth.

2) AN HONOURABLE TRUTH v17-19

Once people start to understand grace- that Jesus does it all, and we do nothing, there is a very common complaint. And we are going to see one species of it in **v17. You may have already been thinking it.**

If traffic bandits are just being let off the hook, left right and centre, where's the justice there. Isn't that just promoting sin?

If Jesus is in the business of showing all people to be sinners, isn't Jesus actively promoting sin, because you can sin all you like and come to him for forgiveness. That's not exactly harsh on sin. Well Paul answers a decisive **NO!** By No means! Absolutely **NOT!** No- justification by faith is an upright truth, an honourable one, not a morally dubious one. Jesus isn't helping people to sin. He's not a sin agent, a sin servant. And it's essential that we are convinced by this because otherwise we'll move to another gospel.

▲ In the past I've been involved with missions at schools and universities, and perhaps over a week you get to know some of the students, and begin to share the gospel with them. And occasionally, and perhaps particularly with religious people (*who think that when they die they will go to heaven because they have helped in chapel or they haven't been immoral like their neighbours*) as they begin to understand the message of free forgiveness- that you can be in the right with God as a free gift, without paying for it- they say, "hang on if you are saying that I can be forgiven whatever I do, can't I just go out and do what I like?".

And I usually answer by saying "Yes- you can go and do what you like. But what you like is now so changed by your new commitment to Jesus as your Lord, and what you like is so changed by your gratitude to Jesus for what he has done, that you don't want to live in those old ways of sin any more.

Christ is no promoter of sin. A clue is in Paul's shorthand "if...IN CHRIST". When a person comes to Jesus, they become IN Jesus, and a whole new way of life begins. We will see more of this in future weeks.

But the surprising answer that Paul gives is that actually it is **law keepers** who are the real sin promoters- look at verse 18. It's a difficult verse and I've recorded a few options for it on the reverse of the dig deeper, but I think that Paul is saying... "It's not Jesus, and those who rely on Jesus who are the promoters of sin, actually it is those who rely on their own obedience of the law who are the transgressors, the real sinners".

If I rebuild what I tore down- [that's the edifice of law keeping that I left behind on the Damascus Road when I put my trust in Jesus as my righteousness]- If I go back to law keeping as the way of getting right with God, I prove **myself**- the law truster to be the real breaker of the law- the real transgressor.

FOR v19, through the law I died to the law- The law for all it's goodness and right standards simply shows me that I am a prisoner of the law- I can't keep it.

Well Paul says I died to the Law- there's no way that I can start trying to get the cash of righteousness through the law because I'm a dead person- I have no relationship with LAW KEEPING any more as a way of getting to God. I've completely repudiated that route to get right with God. My trust is in Jesus' work not in my own work.

Now if you are lost. Don't worry. What Paul has just said in 2 complicated sentences he will unpack in future passages, and you will get it on the repeat. But the long and short of verses 17 to 19 are this. There is nothing morally dubious about trusting Jesus as a way of getting right with God. (We will see in fact far from promoting sin, it actually changes you).

Justification by faith an honourable truth.

It's the alternative which is the real bandit: Justification by works of any sort. We died to that when we became Christians- so don't go back to it. I died to the law so that I might live to God.

➡ So again, don't trust in your own works, trust in Christ. So you had a good day- great praise the Lord. So you had a bad day- OK come back to the Lord in repentance-your standing with him is not affected. Yes your enjoyment of your relationship may be clouded, but your status as "not guilty" is not.

And last of all, and briefly, but perhaps most wonderfully...

3) THIS IS A PERMANENT TRUTH. (LIFELONG)

Let's look at v20 and 21.

Again Paul continues this death theme- he says that he died with Christ. He has no relationship with the law as a way of getting right with God. **When Jesus died, Paul died**, but also when Jesus rose, Paul rose to a new life- "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". And then comes one of the most famous verses in this book, what Leon Morris calls the most moving verse in all of the Bible. "And the life that I now live in the flesh (in the body) I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me". (The memory verse we had earlier).

In other words faith in Jesus was not just for the beginning of his Christian life, but for the whole of it. "We might say living by faith is for life not just for Christmas or conversion". As we go on in the Christian life we never cease to need Jesus' forgiveness and grace, but as we go on in the Christian life that grace never runs out.

The fact that Jesus did enough for me is permanent. The way forward in the Christian life is to stay right where you begun- at the cross. That's what Paul does- look carefully at the verse: LOVED Me, not loves me. Both are true, but Loved points back to the cross as the confidence for that love.

Once you start relying on yourself, v21 you start saying that Jesus' death on the cross is unnecessary.

▲ I heard the story of a woman that had done such a good job at cleaning the car, that the husband said, “you’ll get to heaven”. But if cleaning up our car, house or our act, could ever save us, why did Jesus need to die?

☞ Come to the foot of the cross. look at Jesus dying on the cross. V21.
Would he have died if you could be saved any other way?

☞ And stay at the foot of the cross. This is a permanent truth to live by.
That’s what the verse is saying- the life I live in the body. Don’t supplement faith with a bit of works.

☞ And I can I speak finally to some people here today who are rejoicing in theory for others, but somewhere inside there’s a little voice that tells them, this isn’t for you. They find it hard to make the me of verse 20 their own? I know that because I’m one of them and Satan often whispers, this is too good to be true. You are too bad to be in the right with God. Your faith isn’t genuine enough.

If that is you, can I say to you as I say to myself, look away from yourself. Take your eyes off yourself, even off your faith because it will never be big enough, and turn your eyes upon Jesus on the cross. Well you can make v20 your own.

“Will the defendant please stand”. You rise to your feet in the dock, and God says, “I declare you NOT GUILTY because my son has died instead”.
Let’s pray.