

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**July 6, 2025**  
**Galatians 3:1-29 - Grace not Works**  
**GALATIANS - Law | Life | Freedom**

---

It's good to know the rules isn't it?

Toilet paper over the top; toilet paper down the back; towels folded longways; towels folded sideways;

iron the tea towels this way and the pillow cases that way.

Make sure you say please and thank you, and always be polite.

It's good to know the rules.

But what about when the rules get more serious?

You have to do things in a certain way for the match to be well played.

I just have to look at Chris when he's watching a game of rugby league and he thinks the rules weren't followed properly and the ref made a bad call. It's not pretty.

But what about when rules are applied where they're not meant to be applied?

Last week Peter Bloomfield said that legalism is dangerous. And that's what was happening in the churches of Galatia. There was a small group of Jewish Christians, trying to convince people that the Jewish rules were essential for salvation.

They were teaching that unless the Gentiles were circumcised according to the customs taught by Moses, they couldn't be saved.

It's a big issue.

Do we have to **DO** certain things to be right in God's eyes.

Today's topic is Grace not Works.

The way this chapter starts is Paul at his harshest.

He is incredulous at what is happening.

"You foolish Galatians! he says. Who has bewitched you?"

Many decades ago, JB Phillips wrote a paraphrase of the Bible, and this is how he started Galatians 3:1 - "Dear Idiots".

I think that probably expresses Paul's thinking pretty well.

Paul raises 5 main arguments to convince the Galatians that the key to a relationship with God is not about obeying certain rules, it's always and only through grace.

This is what they needed to understand.

John Stott says - *The Galatians knew perfectly well that the gospel is received by grace. How could they have turned away like they did? The essence of Paul's argument is that their new position is a contradiction of the gospel.*

### **1 Their Conversion (1-5)**

In vv. 1-5 the first thing he points to is their conversion. He says, "Think back to when you first heard the gospel. Was it about rules, or were you simply told what Jesus Christ had done for

you? When you received the Spirit, was it because of your obedience to a set of rules or because you believed the promise?"

"How could you be so stupid as to be led astray by this different teaching."

You see when Paul first preached the gospel to them he told them of Jesus' promise that they'd receive the Holy Spirit; and when they accepted what he said, that's just what happened.

The Holy Spirit was given to them as a gift, as the evidence of their conversion. So why would they now think of reverting to rules, if the gift of the Spirit is still theirs. Did they really think that God's waiting for them to obey these rules before he'll bless?

No, he blesses them because he promised to bless them, and they believed it, and the evidence was in their midst every day.

Why would they want to introduce obedience to a set of laws into that equation?

## 2 The example of Abraham (6-9)

But what about the idea that Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism so the rules that set the Jews apart might still be relevant to the Christian? Cause that's where the Judaizers were coming from.

Well, in vv.6-9 he uses **Abraham as an example**, and points to the real identity of the Jewish people. It doesn't start with Moses and the law; no, it's way before that. It begins with Abraham.

We read it in Genesis today.

How did Abraham become righteous? Well, he says, it's simple. Abraham "**believed** God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (v6)

What was it that Abraham did that made him righteous in God's eyes? Well, he didn't have to **DO** anything. He believed what God told him and that belief was credited to him as righteousness. He got it as a gift.

God also promised that he'd have more descendants than he could count, that he'd take him to a land, and that he'd be blessed, along with **all the nations** on earth. That's a very important point.

**All the nations on earth.**

All he had to do was believe God.

Abraham achieved NOTHING by himself.

He got a son as an old man by a miracle.

The land promised to him came over 400 years later through Joshua's obedience.

And the promise to bless all peoples through him?

Paul says that promise has been fulfilled as the Gentiles have come to believe the promises of God just like Abraham did. All the nations. This is not about one ethnic community that did all things the same way. God's plan from the beginning, was a new multi-ethnic family. So everybody becoming Jewish, was never part of the plan.

These promises to Abraham came before circumcision; they came before the law was given.

Being righteous through faith in God has always been a gift of grace, not because of anything we have to do, and not because of being distinctively Jewish.

Paul points out to them, that those who have faith in Jesus share in the blessings of the covenant God made with Abraham.

What a beautiful thing that is.

### 3 The inevitability of human failure (10-12)

And then in vv.10-12 Paul goes on to talk about how **futile it is to use the law to be righteous before God**.

He says: "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book the law."

The reality of our situation is that we are, by nature, unable to keep the law. No matter how determined we might be, no matter how hard we work on our bad habits, or try to control what comes into our mind, at some point we fail. Every single one of us.

And where are we then? According to Deut 27:26, we're cursed because we haven't kept everything that's written in the book of the law.

Paul also says in Romans chapter 3, for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Even Habakkuk, the little three chapter prophet in the Old Testament understood this. He said that the one who is righteous will live by faith.

If that's the case then the law has nothing to do with it. Receiving grace has nothing to do with keeping the law.

Receiving grace has nothing to do with becoming a Jew in order to be a Christian.

It's interesting that Paul asks an obvious question in v.19 - He says - "What then, was the purpose of the law?"

The law was given as an interim means of looking after us. Its job was to keep us safe until a means of freeing us from our limitations could be found. It was never meant to be permanent.

But it was also meant to show us how much we need to be saved. v.24 tells us that the law was our guardian **until** Christ came. The law was our guardian **until** the grace of the cross.

It showed us that we need something beyond the law.

The frustration we feel in trying to keep the law is part of its design. It's so we'll look beyond the law to faith in Jesus Christ.

If we **could** keep the whole law then we **would** live by it. But only **one** person has ever achieved that. And that's Jesus Christ.

### 4 The meaning of the Cross (13-14)

And that brings us to the fourth point Paul makes for salvation by grace not works.

What was it that Jesus did for us?

Having lived a life of perfect obedience, he then gave himself up to death on a cross. And through that death on the cross he became a curse for us, thus saving us from the curse of the law.

The cross is central to this whole argument.

Jesus' death on the cross achieves something that the law could never do.

Through his death on the cross Jesus took on himself the curse that should have been on us, so that the blessing that Abraham was promised might come to all people, all nations, through faith in Jesus' death on the cross.

This is central to the whole argument because if Christianity were just a religion of rules, of moral behaviour, of niceness, then the cross would become irrelevant.

It would only be an example of sacrifice, or a model of devotion.

But Paul is saying, no. The cross is about Jesus being a substitute for us. That's exactly what Paul is saying.

Jesus takes on himself the curse so we can be delivered from the curse.

The cross isn't an incentive for us to keep the law.

It's the solution to our breaking of the law.

It doesn't change how we feel about our sins, but it does change how God feels about us.

Jesus takes our place so that God can look at us and see the righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ alone.

That happens when we exercise faith in Jesus Christ. It happens when we receive the promise of his Holy Spirit who fills us with God's presence, who gives us the righteousness that comes as a gift .... as we believe the promise.

## **5 The priority of the Promise (15-25)**

And that leads us on to Paul's fifth point for the primacy of faith over law keeping. That is that when God promises something, his promise is kept.

He gives them an example from daily life: once a contract is set up, there's no going back on it. It is acted upon.

And if that's true of a human contract, it's even more true of a divine covenant.

If God promises something, you can be sure that he'll do it.

The original promise to Abraham was given some 430 years before the law was given.

So what effect did the law have on the original promise? Nothing. Because the promise came first.

We've already noted that the law was given for another reason altogether.

The promise to Abraham continued to stand even after the law had been put in place to regulate how the people of Israel lived.

That's the nature of a promise, isn't it. A promise is to be kept.

And that's the sort of promise that God made to Abraham.

But the most important thing in all this is that the promise came first. It is primary.

It's the promise to Abraham that created a relationship with God, not obedience to the law that comes later.

And it's the same with us. Our relationship with God comes about through his promise. It comes through Jesus' death on the cross. It comes as we believe that promise and put our faith in Jesus and what he's done on the cross.

But too often, we behave like that's not true.

We strive to do this or that, to be worthy.  
We keep on wondering whether we've done enough.

We're not quite sure if we'll measure up on the last day.

My friends, if that's you, then you're living like the Galatians were.  
And you know what Paul called them!

We need to learn the lesson that the Galatians needed to learn.

Don't rely on rules, don't let people tell you to rely on what you do.

Rely on God's promise, and respond to that.

I quoted John Stott at the beginning, and I want to quote him again at the end.

*The gospel is not good advice to people, but good news about Christ; not an invitation to us to do anything, but a declaration of what God has done; not a demand, but an offer. If the Galatians had grasped the gospel of Christ crucified, that on the cross Christ did everything necessary for our salvation, they would have realised that the only thing required of them was to receive the good news by faith. To add good works to the work of Christ was an offence to his finished work.*

Friends, if that's the basis on which you stand you can have confidence both now and for eternity that God loves you and will take you to be with him forever.

As Paul says to the Galatians -

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave more free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."