

Sermon Transcript from 21st September 2025 – Justified by Faith

Reference: Galatians 3

Speaker: Denis Golden

Sermon Summary

This sermon explores the fundamental difference between seeking righteousness through **faith in Jesus Christ** and attempting to achieve it through adherence to **the Law**. Looking at Paul's various letters, particularly Galatians, we consider that although the Law served as **a guardian until Christ came**, it was ultimately impossible to fulfil and therefore resulted in a curse. Paul's key argument, drawn from scripture, is that true justification—being **declared righteous** by God—is achieved solely through faith, mirroring the faith of Abraham, who received God's promise before the Law existed. The ultimate message is that Christ's sacrifice redeems believers from the curse of the Law, confirming that God's plan, which enables reconciliation and **makes all believers Abraham's seed**, was established from the beginning.

Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/xrj-MuvVpp8?t=3395>

Sermon Transcript

So, if you were reading along [to Galatians 1] in that passage, perhaps you would keep your Bibles open or if you had a device, keep it switched on because we will refer back to those verses.

My Bible quotes will be coming from the NIV. But it was wonderful to hear this passage in a in a different translation [the NLT]. And actually, it was it was a lovely translation.

But let me start by asking you a question. If Paul was to write to your church, if Paul was to write one of his famous letters to the church at Langley Free Church, I wonder what he would say?

You know, Paul was a great encourager of so many churches and particularly when he opened his letters in his opening remarks. For example, from Romans 1, “first I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being reported all over the world.” Or from Colossians, “we always Thank God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people” even when his letter will go on to admonish to sort of tell off the people that he's writing to.

For example, in the case of the church at Corinth we read those verses or I read those verses this morning and the reason why those verses are in the letter to the Corinthians is because Paul was concerned about the way they were doing communion. They were doing it wrong.

But he opens his letter by saying, “I always thank my God for you because of his because of his given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.”

But when it comes to Galatians, well, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Strong stuff. So, what would he write if he was writing to the church at Langley?

Well, that's not for me to say, but I hope he would have some encouraging things to say to you. I'm sure he would challenge you because who doesn't need to be challenged? But before we get into the passage we've read this morning. I think it's worth recapping what has gone before the context of those verses that I've just read.

Paul is very clearly very disappointed with the church in Galatia. As David told you when he came and spoke to you a couple of weeks ago, this letter to the Galatians was the first letter that Paul wrote. And perhaps a bit unusually, it wasn't actually to a specific church, but a region of churches.

So, as Tony's already said, it's it was in modern day Turkey, as a region, it's become divided. It's turned away from the gospel that Paul taught them, which was a gospel of faith rather than one of obedience to the law. This was these were churches that Paul had established on his first missionary journey. But others had come into the region, and they were telling them that they needed to follow Jewish customs.

In other words, follow the law, which Paul told them was not only unnecessary, but completely wrong.

You know, we've skipped ahead this morning to chapter 3, but chapter 2 is worth reading as well. In chapter 2, Paul goes to Jerusalem and meets with the other apostles or rather Paul is telling of a time when he went to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles including Peter. Let's not forget Paul has self styled himself as the apostle to the Gentiles. And so most of the other apostles and leaders of the church were more focused on being apostles to the Jewish people.

But Paul goes and meets them, including Peter, and he is not happy with Peter, perhaps with some justification. Paul travelled to Jerusalem, as I say, to meet with the other church leaders, but he's upset. He's perturbed to find that a number of them believe that the Gentiles, that is the non-Jews, we would be Gentiles need to be circumcised.

Worse than that, he thinks Peter might actually be thinking the same thing as well. At the very least, Peter seems to be withdrawing from Gentile believers and just associating with Jewish believers and leaders.

And let's not forget that it was Peter who had the vision of the sheep coming down from heaven filled with all the animals and hearing the message from God to say that it was fine to eat them, that God had made them all clean, and it was it was not for us to decide what was clean and what was unclean.

You know, in my research for this sermon, I found a painting from the 1600s which painted this vision, and it was showing a sheep coming down from heaven filled with lots of different animals, including a rather cute dog. Just because you can do a thing doesn't necessarily mean that you should.

Following this, Peter went on to stay with Cornelius the centurion and came to realize that everybody can find favour with God. Now in Jerusalem, he seems to be going back on that. He seems to be going back on his conviction.

I'm sure I've said to you before that Peter is one of my favourite people in the Bible. And the primary reason for that is he gets things wrong. We all know how great Peter was. You know, founder possibly alongside Paul possibly not founder of the church in Rome, you know, an absolute hero for God, a martyr for God, but he gets things wrong.

Kind of gives you hope for yourself really. For example, have you ever gone back on your convictions? Have you ever just associated with other people? People who you think, I probably shouldn't have anything to do with these people, but I don't want to rock the boat. I don't want to uh I don't want to appear judgmental.

So, I'll just go along with it for the time being. I know I have. So, moving on to the verses that we've looked at this morning... Paul doesn't mince his words at the start of our passage this morning. You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you before your very eyes, Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified.

I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

You know, the Galatians had initially believed in what Paul was telling them. They believed in Christ's resurrection and that faith in that was all that was necessary. But now they were reverting back. They were listening to other people and wanting to follow Jewish practices and customs. They were wanting to follow the law.

To use an example from my own work, I work in the motor industry. Would you take your car in for a service or repair and then halfway through decide to march into the workshop and take over the job yourself from the technician?

You know, the Galatians had committed rightly to faith in God through the death and resurrection of Christ. But now they were trying to follow a different path. They were trying to go a different way. Hey, they were trying to follow a wrong path. We may not want to start following Jewish practices and customs today. We might not suddenly turn around and say, "Well, I think we should follow the law now. I think we should obey absolutely every law in Leviticus, for example, and you know, we need to eat a certain way. We need to wear certain things."

But what might get in the way for us today? Sometimes if we're not careful, I think it's ourselves, our desire to go our own way and do our own thing, act on our own wisdom or our own intelligence. Paul asks this question to the Galatians. Did you receive the spirit by the works of the law or by leaving by sorry or by believing what you heard?

Let me ask you that question a different way. Did you receive the spirit because in your own wisdom you thought it was the right thing to do? Did you think, "Yeah, this is this is this is this is the right thing to do. I'm wise. I understand that this is what I should do."

Or did somebody tell you about Jesus and you found that so startling that you had to respond? You had to believe. You had to take that step in faith. You know, this world teaches us that you need to do things through your own ability, that you need to be self-reliant, you need to use your own wisdom. That's the law of today.

Others might say that all religions lead to God and that we're arrogant to believe that only we know the answer. Have you ever read an interview with a celebrity where they go, "I'm spiritual. I believe there's something there." But, you know, it's up to us as individuals to decide how we how we get to God. But it's not arrogance for us.

It's because of Christ's sacrifice that we've been united with God. And so, again, it's our faith in God that is vital. No other religion can lead to God. And in fact, sometimes religion itself isn't the answer. You know, religion without faith is dead. People will say, you know, religion's had a lot to, you know, a lot to answer for in terms of the ills of the world. And you know, sadly, particularly when we look at our own faith, that sometimes can be true. Religion without faith is dead.

I don't know if you know the song Make Room, but a couple of the lines from this song shake up the ground of all my tradition. Break down the walls of all my religion. Your way is better. Because you know sometimes, I fear if we're not careful, church itself can get in the way.

I've heard it said so many times and particularly in a church setting that if you need to get somebody to do something, find a busy person. But he is so busy in the daily workings of church. Are you so busy being involved and it's great to be involved in the work of the church? It's great to be involved doing things, bringing people into faith with God, presenting those opportunities, making those opportunities so people can come and can hear the message, can hear the good news.

But if you're so busy with doing all of that that you don't find time yourself to spend time with God, then I think church is getting in the way.

So, how are we to guard against straying from the correct path. Well, one way is through God's word. And in the next verses, Paul argues his case through scripture, through God's word. What is his case? Well, his case is this that if you have a faith that if you have faith in the resurrection of Christ, then you are a child of Abraham, not subject to the law.

In the next section of this passage, verses 4 to 14, Paul makes his argument against the law using God's word which of course for him was the Old Testament. He explains that Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him Abraham that is as righteousness. That's a direct quote from Genesis 15:6.

It was Abraham's faith in God not because of anything that he'd done. It was his faith in God that gave him his righteousness. As a consequence of this faith, God promises Abraham that all nations will be blessed from you uh blessed through you, which is a quote from Genesis 12:3.

He goes on to explain that if you're under the law, then you are cursed. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of law. That's from Deuteronomy 27:26.

But of course, it's impossible to follow all the laws laid down in the Old Testament, everyone was going to be cursed because nobody could follow all of the laws. If you rely on the law, then you can't possibly have faith. And Paul says the righteous will live by faith, which is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4.

Faith and the law are different things. You can't live by both of them. We can't live in our own strength. We can't walk with God in our own strength and in our own wisdom or by following another religion. We have to have faith in God.

The person who does these things, the law, Paul says, will live by them. Leviticus 18:5, if you want to follow the law, then you have to live by the law. But the law is God-given. We need to free ourselves from it. What are we to do?

Well, there's nothing we can do. But Paul goes on to say, "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 pole." And that's from Deuteronomy 21:23.

Paul is arguing through the scripture. He is using God's word to prove his point, to prove his argument. We are justified by our faith in Christ. But what does justified actually mean? You know, there are all sorts of words we use in church. And sometimes I think it's worth stopping for a minute just to look and to ask what a word actually means.

I think, you know, some of us might say, well, we sort of know what that means. Well, a secular meaning would be having a good reason for doing something. But in a biblical sense, it's God doing the right thing, which is declaring a repentant sinner to be righteous. That is treating the sinner as if they have no sin, as if their sin had never existed. Why? Because Christ died for us. And that got rid of the sin. So we are justified because of Christ's sacrifice. And as such, we are the inheritors of Abraham. We are one of those nations blessed because of Abraham's faith in God.

I'm sure I've spoken to you before about what I like to call the family tree of faith. I love history and I love the idea that there is an unbroken line of faith. Somebody told you about Jesus. Might have been a lot of people, but they told you about Jesus. That's how you became part of God's family. And somebody told them, and somebody told the, and [then] somebody told them and that goes all the way back to the apostles and in turn it goes back to Jesus Christ.

But in fact our family tree of faith stretches back even further than that all the way back to Abraham. He had faith in God, and he was promised that all the nations would be blessed through him Jews and Gentiles. That's us.

And Paul makes this argument through God's word. I'm not about to diminish the importance of prayer. It's important to pray to God and spend time with him. But God's word is equally important. It's what tells us. It's what instructs us. It's how we know that we are justified. That we are made right with God because of Christ's sacrifice.

So that begs the question finally, why the law in the first place?

Because the Israelites kept turning away from God and kept getting it wrong. The law which actually the Israelites desperately wanted so that they could be made right with God. It was a way of bringing them back to God. But unfortunately, it didn't work. That was the problem. It didn't work. And so God needed a new plan or rather an old one because Paul explains that God's promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

And he says that scripture doesn't say seeds or as Tony put it in the New Living, children. He meant one child, not a whole bunch of children. He meant one person, Abraham and one person. And that person was Jesus Christ. And that was God's original promise. Promised all those many years ago before the law even came in to effect to Abraham.

And so, if you'd let me, Paul confirms the wonderful news at the end of this chapter. So, if you have a Bible, perhaps you'll read along with me from [Galatians] verse 23.

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. God has done this for all of us. You know, some believe that the law came first, that that was, you know, that that was that was God's first plan. That was what, you know, God was trying that as a first plan.

It didn't work. And so, God needed the sacrifice of Jesus to reconcile us to him. The wonderful, the good news is that this was God's plan all along. His original promise made to Abraham that we can all be justified not because of what we've done, although we need to have faith.

We need to believe, but because what God has done in giving us his son as a sacrifice for our sins. The law was needed until Jesus came to try and keep people in order, in check, keep people right with God, but it wasn't working. And so, God had his original plan, and it doesn't matter who we are and it doesn't matter what we do. All of us, whatever our background, whatever our circumstance, finally and forever, we can be justified through our faith and reconciled to our father in heaven. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we just give you thanks this morning that we are justified in your eyes, not because of what we've done, but because of what you did for us. You sent your son to die for us. So that if we have faith in him, we can be reconciled to you. As we go out into this week, Lord, we just pray that we wouldn't try to go our own way, that we wouldn't try to do our own thing, that we wouldn't listen to people out there who would say to us that what we believe is wrong, that what we believe is arrogant, that we would hang on to the words that you teach us through your word. Lord, a word that is as relevant today as it was yesterday. That we would focus on your truths, that our faith would remain strong in you through your spirit that we can be bold not because we're bold people but because you are God

In Jesus name. Amen.