



### 3. 'What is the gospel?'

Galatians 2.15-3.14  
(Romans 1.16-17)

#### Background

In two short verses (Rom.1.16-17) the apostle Paul sets out the essence of the gospel – what makes it good news, why it matters, and how this has always been the way God has worked. Few things matter more, therefore, than that we are clear about the gospel.

Paul's statement at this point in his letter to the Romans provides a summary of the gospel which he'll then spend the larger part of the letter explaining. It's thus an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the main components of the gospel. In particular it's helpful to understand what's meant by his statements that the gospel is (1) the power of God, and that it reveals (2) the righteousness of God – and to understand what's meant by the quote from the prophet Habakkuk that *"the just (righteous) will live by faith"*.

This was the text that changed Martin Luther's life and, at least to an extent, triggered the Reformation: *"thus,"* he wrote, *"was this place in St. Paul to me the very gate of paradise."*

It was not just in his letter to the Romans, however, that Paul set out these basic truths of the gospel: in his earlier letter to the Galatians he elaborates on the same theme, in a way that many have seen as preparing the ground in his mind for what he would later write to the church at Rome. It's with his teaching in the letter to the Galatians that this study is preoccupied, insofar as it provides something of a commentary on those two verses in Romans 1.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul starts from the premise that God is righteous and recognises that our common understanding of how we get right with such a righteous God is by living righteous lives – lives, that is, that are lived in conformity with God's righteous law. But that, he argues, is a dead end: none of us ever actually measure up. 'How then can a mortal be righteous before God?' ([Job 25.4](#)).

The gospel is God's answer to that question. Not the removal of the requirement for such righteousness, but the provision by God of just that righteousness through the life and death of His Son: a 'dual' righteousness, whereby the demands of the righteous law of God are met by (a) the truly righteous life of Jesus, and (b) the costly death of Jesus whereby He bore the curse of God upon our lack of righteousness, in our place.

Read the whole passage. 'Days' (1), (3) and (7) have additional questions.

## 1) Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January – by grace alone

Read [Galatians 2.15-16](#)

*“.. by the works of the law no one will be justified ..” (Gal.2.16)*

‘How then can a mortal be righteous before God?’ asked Job ([Job 25.4](#)). In some ways the most basic question of all. Neither ‘pedigree’ (“*Jews by birth*”) nor performance (“*works of the law*”) do the business. None of us measure up. It must be by grace.

How would you answer those who believe that by going to church, reading the Bible, saying their prayers, and being good, upright and kind, they will be ‘justified’ by God?

Why is Paul so categorical in declaring that ‘by the works of the law no one will be justified’?

Paul brackets together those who are ‘Jews by birth’ and those who are ‘sinful Gentiles’: are there any benefits of having a Christian upbringing?

Or can that actually get in the way of a saving faith in Jesus?

How can you avoid subtly starting to think that your faith in Jesus is somehow what *earns* you your status of being justified?

**Prayer:** *How precious is that grace by which alone we are saved, my Lord! But how prone I am to persuading myself that somehow I may earn Your favour by my faith!*

## 2) Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January – set free from sin

Read [Galatians 2.17-19](#)

*“.. through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God ..” (Gal.2.19)*

Grace seems risky. If we’re put right with God without reference to our ‘performance’, isn’t that a license to do as we like (‘sin’)? Properly understood, grace deals with and effectively ‘destroys’ sin, freeing us up to live for the Lord. To persist in sin is perverse!

What does Paul mean by saying that “through the law I died to the law”?

We often find a ‘gravitational pull’ dragging us back into living our lives seeking to please God by our performance: how can we ensure we live in grace?

**Prayer:** *Make me always dependent on You, Lord in all my ways – conscious of my need of Your forgiveness, mindful of Your patient grace, and eager for Your glory.*

## 3) Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January – Christ in you

Read [Galatians 2.20-21](#)

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal.2.20)*

Trusting in Jesus unites you with Him, and all that's true of Him is true now of you. He died – so you died. He's risen and alive – so you now live: but it's no longer you who lives, but the Lord Jesus living His righteous life in you and through you by His Spirit.

**What does Paul mean when he says that “I have been crucified with Christ”?**

In what ways does this truth that “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” transform your living and your experience?

**How can Paul say, in one breath as it were, ‘I no longer live’ and almost immediately ‘I now live’?**

Why would Christ's death have been ‘for no purpose’ if being right with God was tied to our obedience of His law?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, how I thank You for that grace whereby You and the Father have come by Your Spirit to make Your home in me! Glorify Yourself through me this day.*

#### **4) Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January – life in the Spirit**

Read [Galatians 3.1-6](#)

*“.. by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard ..” (Gal.3.2)*

The new life, lived in the power of the Spirit of God, is never earned. You don't receive that new life through your meritorious performance ('works of the law'): and you don't continue to enjoy that new life through such performance on your part either.

If someone asked you how you receive the Spirit, what would your answer be?

Read [Acts 5.32](#): how does what Paul writes here square with Peter's testimony that the Holy Spirit is 'given to those who obey Him'?

**Prayer:** *Thank You, O my Father, for giving us Your Son, and leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done. Empower me today by Your Spirit, to live for Your greater glory.*

#### **5) Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January – through faith alone**

Read [Galatians 3.7-9](#)

*“.. those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham ..” (Gal.3.9)*

Grace was never God's 'Plan B'. From the start, the promise of blessing articulated by God to Abraham ([Gen.12.1-3](#)) was not conditional upon our obedience: God's blessing is secured for us in Christ and received by us through faith. That's how it's always been.

What does Paul's statement in v.8 tell you about the nature of Scripture?

In what ways did Abraham demonstrate himself to be 'the man of faith'?

**Prayer:** *Teach me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy ways: Thy gracious aid afford, teach me Thy way! Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight, teach me Thy way.*

## 6) Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January – by faith you live

Read [Galatians 3.10-12](#)

“.. it says, ‘The person who does these things will live by them’ ..” (Gal.3.12)

The choice we have is starkly set out for us in Scripture in terms of getting right with God: either we **try** or **trust**. Go for the former, try to keep the law – and if you step out of line at any point, in any way (which you will), then you fall under the curse of God.

Read [Psalm 24](#): why is such a high standard demanded of those who would draw near to God?

Why is the state of our hearts as important as our outward actions so far as the law of God is concerned?

**Prayer:** *And can it be, my Lord, that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood? amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

## 7) Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January – new life in Christ

Read [Galatians 3.13-14](#)

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ..” (Gal.3.13)

Christ could only bear the curse of God for us, because, as one of us, He alone had kept the law in every part and earned thereby God’s blessing. That blessing, promised by the Father, secured by the Son, is applied now by the Spirit that we might truly live!

What are the implications for you of our having been ‘redeemed from the curse of the law’ by Christ?

What difference does that actually make to how you live your life?

How does the regular Sunday worship of your congregation give expression to our being a people redeemed at such huge cost by the Lord Jesus?

What is ‘the blessing given to Abraham’ and how is that experienced in our lives as believers?

In what ways has your being the recipient of the Spirit of God transformed your living and your experience?

**Prayer:** *With all my soul this day again I praise You, glorious, gracious King of heaven! Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven – what cause I have to sound out Your praise!*