

God's gospel brings freedom for God's glory

Rejoice that we are free! Establish that this freedom comes from God.

Galatians

Making Much of the Cross of Christ

Resources

- **Notes on Galatians – J.Gresham Machen.** This is the most helpful study guide I've found on Galatians – great clarity on the big ideas and detail – particularly in the first half of Galatians.
- **BST Galatians – John Stott.** It's ok, but not great on the big picture.
- **Finding Joy – Marcus Honeysett.** Deals with the general themes of Galatians with some very helpful points about chapters 3-4.

This resource includes Bible studies and articles on Galatians. Further articles at: <http://thebluefish.blogspot.com/search/label/Galatians>

Freedom, for God (v1-5)

What does the gospel do?

How did this happen?

What is the present evil age? (see also 1v14, 4v8, 5v1)

What is it not?

What did it look like for Paul to have been set free? (v14,23)

When was he set free? (v15-16)

Why does God set people free?

What does freedom look like in our lives?

Fighting for the Galatians & the Gospel (v6-10)

What accusation is Paul countering here? (6-10)

Why might Paul be accused of trying to win approval?

How might we seek to win approval, this year?

What matters most to Paul?

How might this shape the way Paul writes this letter?

What ministry priority would this give us?

Freedom, from God (v11-24)

Where does the gospel that Paul preaches come from? (11-24)

Why does Paul need his readers to know this? (v16,19,20)

Why would it matter that the gospel Paul preaches is from God not men?

Where will we find the gospel?

How does this affect our ministry with students?

Galatians 2v1-3v1

Application of the Cross - Crucified with Christ

Add nothing! Know that you died, now Christ is your life. The Cross is All!

2v1-10 The Apostles Added Nothing

Why did Paul go to Jerusalem again? V1,2

Why does it matter that he went "in response to a revelation"?

How was his concern relieved? V3,6,9

How does he relate to the other apostles? V2,6,8

Why did they yield to the false brothers? V4,5

Why v10?

2v11-21 Cross plus anything is Cross-denied

How has Paul shown his apostolic independence so far in ch1-2? How is that now shown in v11?

What leads someone to be classed as "condemned"?

What was Peter's crime in v12-13?

What is Paul's diagnosis, v11 & v14?

How are Paul and Peter – justified and not justified?

What is they are found to have sinned? V17

What if we're found to sin?

What if they return to The Law? V18

What if we re-impose kinds of spiritual slavery?

What did The Law do for Paul and Peter? V19

What is the substance of their life now? V20.

What is the effect of the cross upon them?

What is the effect of returning to The Law? V21 x2

Peter wouldn't have denied the Cross, what was his error?

Why doesn't Paul tell us how Peter responded?

Why retell this for the Galatians – see 3v1?

What then should we take away from this?

Galatians 3v1-14

"Hear with Faith"

Love the Cross. Hear with faith- receive the Spirit & counted righteous.

Recap: Where did Paul fix Peter/Galatians/our attention?

Always God's plan to bless the nations

Where are the Galatians directed in v9?

What does Paul remind them of in their experiences, v2-4?

How did they begin/receive?

What does he remind them of from scripture? V6.

Why does he recall these things in v2-6? V7.

How does Paul show that the peoples can be justified in v8-9?

What is "*the gospel according to Abraham*" ?

What is surprising there?

How does this diverting the Galatians from their folly?

What's here to excite us?

Summary: What has God done? How has he done it?

Unanswered Qn... why does this mean look at the cross?

Christ bears the curse to bring the blessing

What does it mean to rely on works of the law?

What happens if people do this?

Why does this happen?

Why is no-one justified by the law? V11-12

So what was the state of the Jews? V10-12

How does Jesus dying help? v13

What is the result of this for the peoples in v14?

How is this the result of Christ bearing the curse?

So, why look to the cross? (3v1)

How does this flesh out the "*life in the Son of God*"? (2v20)

Galatians 3v15-26

Promises are for sons!

Don't get locked up by the law.. rejoice in God's promise. Blessed Sons!

15-18 – Promise to Abraham & Jesus

What is the human example Paul uses?

What was God's promise (3:8/14)

Who was the promise made to?

What's surprising here?

Why does he tell us this (17/18)?

What will the law not do?

19-20 – Law because of sin

Why was the law added? (19)

For how long would the law stand?

Why does it matter how it was given?

21-23 – Law to imprison sinners

Why isn't the law opposed to the promise?

If the law didn't give life & righteousness, what then did it do?
(22/23)

Would it be good for a Christian to submit to the law?

24-26 – Son in Christ, by faith!!

What did the law do for the Jews?

What does it now do for them?

What changed?

What does that mean for the peoples? (26)

How does that feel?

Galatians 3v27-4v7

Sons & Heirs

Outside (3v27-28)

1. What happens when someone becomes a Christian (27)
2. How does this effect outward perceptions? (27-28)
3. How does this emphasise the all of v26?

Inside (3v29-4v7)

4. What is the implication of being Christ's? How?
5. How does his illustration help us understand what has happened to us? (v1-5)
6. What are we delivered from?
7. How are we delivered?
8. What are we delivered for?
9. What happens on the inside because we're sons?
10. Who are you?

Galatians 4v8-5v1

The Self-defeating strategy of rule-keeping

Slavery is miserable (4v8-20)

1. Where have they come from?
2. How might Paul have wasted his efforts? (also 2v2)
3. How are their pre-Christian past and present foolishness the same?
4. How are law & idols the same

5. What is Paul's goal for them? (v8, 15, 19)
6. How was this showing before? (v15-16)
7. Why does he appeal to their past relationship?
8. What motivates false teachers? (v17, 6v12)

9. UAQ? – how will Christ be formed in us??

Slavery has no future (4v21-5v1)

10. What's the story?
11. What's the allegory?
12. What's the point? (4v31, 5v1)
13. What inheritance is on offer?
14. What must we do? 5v1

Galatians 5v1-14

The Cross & Christian Freedom = Love

1. What was the command in v1?
2. What are the three implications of submitting to slavery? (v2, v3, v4)
3. 'How' is circumcision a problem? How do we then live – what will be the sign of this?

4. Why does Paul ask them whether he's preaching circumcision?
5. How does his persecution prove his case?
6. How might we indulge our freedom?
7. What does it look like to use exercise our freedom rightly? (what about the **law** aspect of this?)

Galatians 5v15-26

Killing Sin by the Holy Spirit

1. What will happen if we walk by the Spirit? (16)
2. Why might this not happen? (17a)
3. But, what will end up happening? (17b)
4. Are we then compelled to sin? (18)
5. What controls us? When then do we find sin compelling?
6. What is the result of walking by law/flesh? (19-21)
7. Why is this so serious?
8. What must we do if we belong to Christ? (24)
9. Will I kill my sin by abstaining from it?
10. How will we kill our sin? (25)
11. What would this look like? (22-23)
12. How can we make a habit of doing this?
13. What is a good test of whether or not this is happening? (15,26)
14. What will it feel like to walk by the Spirit? (17)

Galatians 6

Cross-exalting Community

v1-10

- How does my view of others change? And of myself?
- (stop to dwell on the different areas mentioned)
- If we buy into a performance culture (law keeping) how could that work against this cross-centred community?
- What incentive is given? (7, 8, 9)

v11-18

- What are the goals of the law keepers? (three things, v12-13)
- What is Paul's resolution?
- How can the cross be his only confidence?
- Why is circumcision so valueless?
- Think back through the letter – e.g. 2v20, 5v2

- What will it look like for us to be cross-centred individually and together as God's people? (again review the letter as a whole – e.g. 3v29)
Praise God for the cross – make it look big!

Articles on Galatians

previously published at thebluefish.blogspot.com

What's the problem with false teaching?

In the 21st Century saying that someone is cursed is very politically incorrect. Our tolerant age just cannot handle having someone branded as wrong (or worse). That of course is a somewhat intolerant tolerance, since for all its virtuous noises it doesn't quite tolerate everything.

When it comes to Christianity this raises a whole host of problems. And here's one of them. The Bible is not ashamed to say that there are things that are worthy of being cursed. And the curse the Bible speaks of is not something mystic or strange, but rather God's rightful punishment of our sin. If we think we should not be cursed then this betrays that we have not begun to see the depth of our sin.

Three curse moments happen in the book of Galatians. Firstly, Paul says that if anyone - even an angel or himself - preaches a gospel contrary to the genuine apostolic gospel (Galatians 1:8) then they should be cursed. Isn't that a bit strong? Secondly, Paul declares Peter to be accursed (Galatians 2:11) - over the incident of the bacon sandwich at Antioch. Isn't that a bit strong? A bit confrontational? A bit over the top? And thirdly, Paul says that Christ became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), to redeem us from the curse of the law. Which is to say that we were cursed by God, but Jesus' curse bearing death changes things so that we receive God's blessing instead of God's curse - a blessing that includes at its heart being counted righteous by God and receiving the promised Holy Spirit.

It seems to me that all three here are interconnected. Paul shows us that the essence of the gospel is that God will bring a blessing to all peoples through his promise to Abraham. This is God's desire - to show favour to the peoples of his world. But, there is a problem - namely that the peoples are slaves to sin, rebels against God. If God is to be favourable to human beings then that curse must be

removed. The only way to remove the curse from human beings is for Jesus to take our place, hanging on a tree, cursed in our place. Thus, he is cursed and we get blessed! If it could have been done another way, it would have. This was the only way.

Peter's problem was that by imposing food laws on Christian believers from among the peoples of the world he was denying the curse-bearing power of the Cross of Christ. That is to say, he was teaching them that God's favour to them was conditioned upon them keeping certain rules and rituals... and Paul says that if that is the case then Christ's death was meaningless, because it would mean that he had not in fact borne the curse of God at all. Thus, for all his good motives and intentions Peter was denying the one thing that could be of any help. Cross denied, curse remains.

And this is the same when we find Paul in Galatians 1 speaking about gospel preaching in general. If someone alters the gospel then they will have a different one. They will have a gospel to preach that either adds to or takes away from the true gospel. In so doing it will marginalise and ultimately deny the meaning of the death of Jesus. When this happens the curse of God remains upon people... cross denied, curse remains.

Taking God's word and twisting it for our own ends is a terrible crime. But it goes deeper than just being a crime against God's revelation. Modifying the gospel produces "a new kind of Christianity" - "non-Christianity" (as Mark Driscoll puts it). If we start to play fast and loose with God's revealed gospel we do great violence to the one thing that can remove God's curse from us, and bring us the awesome blessing he would show to us - to life in Christ, to life in the Holy Spirit. To life with God forever.

Paul is not in the business of witch-hunting after false teachers. Rather he writes a deep and personal and truth-saturated appeal to the Galatians. He seeks to draw them away from what is false and cross-denying. He wants only that their hearts would be drawn back to the joys and freedom and divine blessing. False teaching is a problem because it denies the wondrous Cross of Jesus, and so leads men and women to nothing better than the curse of God. And God delights to pour out his blessing, and the Cross is the one way to this blessing.

Lifestyle is a matter of justification

I have some more developed thoughts on this which I may blog shortly... but, here's the thing: It's Paul vs. Peter at The Curious Incident of the Bacon Sandwich in Antioch (known to us as Galatians 2:11-21), retold for the benefit of the foolish Galatian Christians (3:1). And its told to confront the Galatians for falling into Peter's error.

What was Peter's error: he implicitly declared that non-Jewish believers should keep the Jewish food laws (something he no longer did, having been set free in Christ). And Paul confronts him not for being cruel or mean, but for standing condemned - out of step with the gospel. Essentially he says - your lifestyle is a matter of justification.

We're often keep to say that lifestyle is sanctification, because we don't want people to think that they have to perform to be justified. But this incident takes it from a slightly different angle... and says, if you start imposing law then it is very much a matter of justification: of denying the only way to be justified...

Why? Because, Paul concludes (for the Galatians benefit) in 2v21, if you impose a lifestyle of law then you deny that the Cross of Christ has any meaning to get you right standing with God. That is to say, your lifestyle sinks the one way you could be justified.

We're not told how Peter took this (though the existence of the later letters by Peter would suggest he repented) because we don't need to know. The story is left hanging because the Galatians are hanging... hanging over the edge like Peter was. Why? Because they're submitting to law and so denying the Cross, just like Peter did.

Like Peter they really should know better - why? Because Paul preached the full meaning of the Cross to them when they we're'n't Christians - and hearing that with faith they became Christians! Paul wasn't talking nonsense and meaningless words to them - it was the solid true meat of the meaning of the Cross.

Lifestyle is a matter of justification. If you're justified by faith then you don't need to add to your justification. It is complete because of the Cross of Christ. So don't live by law... be free! Neither should we be re-enlaved to sin... Instead: enjoy the freedom of living by and in the Holy Spirit. Don't add rules - look to the Cross of Christ and boast in its meaning.

The Self-Defeating Strategy of Rule-Keeping

1. The joyless slavery of rule-keeping (4v8-20)

Why did the Galatians get enslaved? Was it fear? The pressure of persecution or opposition... peer-pressure... shame of the cross... persuasive personality... convincing words about Christian maturity? Perhaps a desire to avoid sinning. All of these and others are possible reasons why they submitted to rule-keeping. None of them ultimately make sense and whichever it was left Paul thoroughly perplexed.

He begins by equating law-keeping with slavery to idols. This is a shocking connection. The experience and reality of rampant sin and law keeping are indistinguishable. We'd be unlikely to imagine that religious zeal, whether in rituals or religious days or otherwise could be the same as outright sin. But, it's as miserable in it's slavery and undoes the work of the gospel. It leads to the gospel's work in us being in vain. All the glorious promises and power of the gospel cancelled out by the foolishness of submitting to law.

Never one to be guarded Paul displays his utter anguish and perplexity at the way young Christians he has loved and served are being ensnared so easily. Heretics have come in amongst them and gathered a following with their populist message. Their rule-keeping message feeds believers ego by giving them a part to play. It appeals perfectly to the sinful nature whilst looking pious.

The heretics arrive full of zeal. But zeal is not their crime. Paul is all for zeal and passion, he has it in abundance. But it must be passions for the gospel not for fanmail or false teaching. He recalls the zeal with which the gospel was recieved by the Galatians, and the great

joy they had - yet now they live in the misery of law-keeping slavery.

Rulekeeping is utterly senseless. It doesn't compute. Slavery to religious law might look good, but actually it is a miserable way to live today. Useless. Rules aren't a way to resist sin they're just a way to return to it's slavery. It's the classic con. A strategy that looks spiritual, but is self-defeating. Spurgeon says "The preaching of morality seemed to lead to immorality", and more! When rule-keeping morality is required of a Christian it is immorality.

Sin isn't to be avoided because there are rules against it. It should be avoided because it's bad, it destroys joy and only makes much of people. In the words of 6v12, it evades persecution for the Cross and 2v21 - makes nothing of it. It minimises and denies the reputation and work of the Cross. Any such strategy is doomed to fail and is inherently evil.

2. The futureless slavery of rule-keeping (4v21-5v1)

And then comes the wierd bit. It involves the recall of Old Testament history, an allegory from it, and some conclusions drawn. The conclusions aren't all that difficult even if they route to them seems a bit peculiar. Paul draws the story and allegory from the law. He does this because those he writes to are captivated by the law - and so, just as he did in chapter 3, he uses the law against them. The story is Abraham. God promises that his wife Sarah will have a child by God's power. Abraham struggles to believe that his barren aged wife will bear a child, so he has a child "in the ordinary way" with his slave Hagar. From this he extrapolates an allegory or figurative understanding of the story.

(We don't appear to be given a Pauline right to allegorise the story of salvation... rather Paul allows the story to instruct us by drawing parallels and warnings for us from it at high altitude.)

He moves from Hagar to Sinai and then to Jerusalem. All three he says lead to slavery. And so the path of slavery is to be gotten rid of. Slaves will persecute the free but they're living in the past. Their way is his already history. It leads to misery now, and has no future - no inheritance This is in contrast with Sarah and "the Jerusalem above". Notice no in-between-phase here. The people who are free are plugged back into the old, old promise to Abraham. The law had

been just a temporary measure to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Logically Hagar will have more children, and law makes people better. But Paul draws on words in Isaiah to assert that God's plans defy that. It's the barren woman who produces more children. Freedom leads to inheritance, to a future! Those who are free then should be free. They should resist any attempts to burden them with slavery. Attempts will come to return the free to slavery - opposing them outright, or singing their praises to win them over... same difference.

In chapter 5-6 Paul will flesh out what it means to have Christ formed in us - to be a new creation and how to live in freedom and keep in step with the Spirit, but the application here is simple. RESIST slavery. However appealing the teaching, or persuasive it's arguments... however safe or secure it might seem to use rule... Whatever anyone says: The Christian must fight against rule-keeping with all the zeal they have. Say no with a passion! Don't be burdened. Don't be a rule keeper any more than embracing idolatry. Neither works, because rules lead to misery today and no tomorrow.

Joy and a secure future make much more sense! The slavery of rules is to be avoided because it defames the cross and destroys the blessing Christ won there - God's sure promise of blessing for all peoples, of the Holy Spirit and sonship and life in Christ. There has to be a better way, a better way to find joy today and hope for tomorrow.

A riff on friendship at the foot of the cross

As of today I have 196 friends. Must be true cos facebook says so! What is friendship? A list of names on a webpage? The number of hits thebluefish.blogspot.com gets on Technorati? Can a click of a mouse create a friendship? Friendship takes time and depth. I do know most of those 196 people to some extent but could we call it friendship? Is it the kind of relationship where they know how I tick, and vice-versa? Do they know my struggles and weakness? In how many of those 196 cases do we know what God is doing in one another's lives? In how many is there depth of trust and deep love for

one another... If I'm honest, many of my closest friends aren't on facebook at all!

Out in the slightly more real world we see thousands audition for X-Factor and the like... I can't sing at all, and neither can most of these people. The difference is that I have a measure of self-awareness, and friends and family who will tell me the truth. Too many of these people must be hated by their friends and family who won't tell them the honest truth about their lack of talent... Is that friendship? The ability to lie convincingly and passionately to one another?

"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Proverbs 27v6. That's not to say friends should attack one another but it ought to include some measure of honesty! And not just about weaknesses, but strengths also. A couple of weeks ago I asked a few people who know me well to share what they consider to be my strengths and weaknesses. What could be more helpful!

Often seems easier to see weaknesses in others, and strengths in ourselves. And surely that's where the gospel hits friendship. As a Christian I have one and only one boast: the cross of Christ. There all strengths and weaknesses are levelled out. I'm no longer defined by comparison to other people. Galatians 6 tells me that I am a new creation in Christ. Set free to love others, to bear their burdens and seek to restore them.

The old life of law, sin and performance revelled in comparison, it rejoiced in my victory over others or wallowed in my comparative weaknesses. Now none of that is required! The only goal is for Christ to be formed in each of us. And the more than can happen to you the better for you and for me alike!

I am, simultaneously, a work in progress and a work completed at the cross! Everything that needed to be done has been done. And God's on my case every day. But, on the road I need others to help me. Not people who will win me over to themselves, but who will win me to more joy in Christ. I need people who will help me to discern my sin not by being sin-obsessed but by being Cross-obsessed. Most importantly people who will discern grace in my life, seeing and encouraging the effects of the Cross in me.

I need people who will spur me on. People who will help me to keep on running to the end of the grace. People who will unswervingly point me to the Cross of Christ. People who will help me to lift my eyes from the instability of my thinking, my weak and changing affections and my foolish actions. Lifting my heart and mind to the cross of Christ. Over the last few years I've had the privilege of studying Galatians with Steve, Tom, Paul, Dave, Debbie, Tim, Ed and Carolina... God has opened my eyes and changed me through that. And those guys have pointed me back to the cross as we've gathered around God's word week by week.

This time around I've been particularly humbled to see that the way I live has the power to show the value of the cross in my life. If I go back to slavery to law or sin or anything else, then I nullify the Cross... if I add to it in anyway then it is of no use to me. But if I will rejoice in it, boast in it, revel in who it makes me and delight in the people it brings me into friendship with... then, then, then the Cross will look big. Not because my life will bring something small into sight. No! The cross is vast. It is magnificent. It shines brilliantly....

Social utilities like Facebook are all well and good, but real friendship is built around the Cross of Jesus. My identity isn't found in having 196 facebook friends. My boast is not found in how many people write on my wall. Where will those things get me? What I need the Cross, and friends who love the Cross.