Paul's letter to the Galatians – Chapter 2 v15 to 3 v14
(scripture quotes are from the NIV UK version, 2011)

Intro

In this next section we dip into Paul's contrast between the law of Moses and faith in Jesus [the] Christ. (Christ is a title signifying Jesus as the one who rescues humanity into an accepted relationship with God.)

Works of the Law or Faith?

Paul uses this phrase (see 2:15-16) to highlight the biggest difference,

- 'Works', under the law of Moses. The emphasis was on the people to show their right response to God by following specific customs as part of keeping the law's requirements. Only by doing so, so they thought, would God accept them.
- Faith in Jesus Christ starts with God's acceptance of his people, simply by their positive confession of Jesus as Christ. Doing good works, *which Paul does not talk about until chapter 6*, is a response of the Jesus-followers to the amazing grace of God who has accepted them as his children. This is why Paul uses the term 'brothers and sisters' throughout his letter.

If Paul does not talk about doing good works as a response to relationship with Jesus until later, how does he explain what faith in Jesus is?

He literally uses a life and death picture!

- "I died to the law so that I might live for God" (2:19)
- "I have been crucified with Christ [who] lives in me…
- The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God" (2:20)

How is this life possible?

- By receiving God's Spirit. (Paul asks a rhetorical but pointed question, 'did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?' (3:2)

Remember, the church of Galatia had already received Paul, turned to Jesus and received God's Spirit to direct their new life. Paul had spent much time with them and built friendships with them. This is why he is so heart-broken and direct in his challenge. And what a challenge,

'**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?**'

Wow! Another strong statement. Not designed to demean the Galatians but to grab their attention to their life and death situation before God. (The ancient proverb states, 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.' (Prov.27:6)
Reminding them of the joy in life by faith, made possible by God's Spirit he asks again, 'does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (3:2)

Paul now references the patriarch Abraham explaining that Abraham was credited as righteous before God because he believed God when told that God would make him a father of many nations. More than that, Paul tells them God's promise was, 'All nations will be blessed through you' (3:8)

The point? God's promise was made before the law of Moses and has higher authority because **God never breaks his promises** and his promise went beyond the direct descendants of Abraham.

The Israelites had the problem that they could never manage to fulfil all the requirements of the law. (It is why the law included instructions for making sacrifices and a day of atonement (making amends) so that they could be considered righteous before God.)

For Paul, the law acted to highlight what was right and wrong, but it could not bless. He cites scripture to demonstrate that those who failed 'to do everything written in the Book of the Law' was cursed (3:10) (hence the sacrifices were a regular part of the people seeking to make amends to God and to receive his blessing.)

But Paul does not leave them hopeless. He moves from Abraham to Christ, reminding them of how Jesus had made the ultimate (once for all) sacrifice by becoming the curse (3:13) 'in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that **by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit**' (3:14)

Blessing and promise. It is a lifetime promise of his presence and peace. We finish this section with good news. It is Jesus' work that has removed the curse of unrighteousness and broken relationship with God. We cannot

persuade or placate God by our own works and do not need to. Instead, both hereditary Jew and non-Jew (Gentiles) step into God's promise of life with him by placing their trust in Jesus. A sign this happens is God's own Spirit coming to renew our hearts and directing us in righteous ways. (He speaks more on life by the Spirit in chapter 5; again, before speaking about doing good works)

Summary

- Life by rules of good works is doomed to failure. Paul says they are in vain as we cannot justify ourselves to God
- The good news is that God made a promise that he would resolve credit his people with righteousness as a gift of grace saying,
    - 'those who rely on faith (which means trust) are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith' (3:9)
- Paul highlights that God's promise is experienced in us by receiving God's Spirit and that it is the Spirit 'that works miracle among you' (3:5)

Our Challenges for reflection

- In what ways do you try to do good works by your own efforts that rely on your own willpower, skills and knowledge?
    - Often, this also causes anxiousness in us and annoyance toward others!
- Let's start instead by thanking Jesus for doing those hard works for us and making us right in God's eyes as a blessing to us
- As we do so, it is normal to think of things that we have struggled with and ways where we have not thought or acted in a godly way. Allow them to come to mind, admit them to God and ask his forgiveness for them.
- Come back into thankfulness by accepting his gift of forgiveness and asking for his Spirit's help to live life in the firm belief that he is with you
- Look out for the signs of this in all sorts of miracles (great and small. A common phrase is 'oh, that's a funny coincidence) Thank Jesus!