

247 God's Big Picture – and what a picture!

Paul's teaching on the law, in places like Romans and Galatians, is notoriously complex and difficult, even when guided by Tom Wright, as our little Bible study group is. I'm certainly not claiming to have 'found the answer', but the thoughts I shared on Galatians 3 yesterday seemed to resonate with the group, so maybe they will help others.

Paul, a highly studied, highly dedicated Pharisee, wants us to see the Big Picture, in order to understand why the Kingdom of Jesus is so revolutionary, why he was willing to put up with so much (human-inflicted) suffering in sharing the good news of God's kingdom of **faith**, and why he got so cross when people in the church were returning to the security of the law (**works**).

The Big Picture starts when God creates the world and comes to live in it. Early days and it's all good, very good: Adam and Eve trust God, enjoy being with God. Then untrust enters – we begin to doubt that when God says something, it's true and good and right. *'But what if...?'* we say.

To undo the mess we've created God has a Plan and starts with Abraham, a man of trust, a man of **faith**, but the ultimate goal is the glorious restoration of the whole of creation, but that will take thousands and thousands of years. Thankfully, God sees the Big Picture.

The basis of that restoration is that God promises, and humans respond in **faith**. As Paul says, *Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'*^[3:6]

Now, it will help if we can try to stop ourselves thinking of the word 'righteousness' as 'doing the right things' (**works**); it's more about 'being in a right relationship with God' (**faith**).

As Paul explains,^[3:17] at 430 years into this multi-millennial project, God gives the law to this community of **faith**, as a temporary assistant (Tom translates it as a 'baby-sitter'), but Paul talks about our being 'enslaved' by the law (**works**). *Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*^[3:23]

However, into that law, God has cunningly sowed the seed of what Jesus came to do – to bring people back to living by **faith** – and in doing so, Jesus fulfilled the law, and **faith** was revealed.

Why did Jesus get so cross with the Pharisees? After all, they (inc. Paul/Saul) were zealous to please God? Thing is, they were focused on **works** – keeping the law (and working out the minutiae of what that meant). And why was Paul even *more* cross with the Judaisers? They had *started* with **faith**, but were going *back* to **works** – keeping the law (working out the minutiae).

And today? How are we living? Are we studying our Bibles to work out how we (or they) should behave (**works**) or are we studying our Bibles to grow closer to God through **faith**?

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