

248 Galatians' rule, not OK

My studies in Galatians have made me feel yet more strongly about all this, especially after reading Tom Wright's commentary on Galatians 4. That's ironic, given Tom's negative comments about gay sex, within a book of 2011.^[243] (But maybe he's now acknowledged David Gushee's view – I only changed my mind a couple of years ago.)

Thing is, I feel Paul's pain:^[Gal 4] I've just listed eight people I have known and loved for an average of 32 years each, all of whom think (to some degree) that I'm 'barking', because I believe that covenanted gay sex should be a matter of personal conscience, not a matter of law.

But I feel *your* pain, too. I understand your concern about the 'sexual revolution', and I too see the destruction of family life that has resulted, but I fear that your last ditch stand against gay sex – even within gay marriage – is not helpful.

So why am I risking alienating you totally by today's comments? Because I see a strong parallel with Galatians. No, of course I'm not putting myself on a par with Paul – despite my name.

You might have noticed my excitement over my new-found faith these past five years, as I've wrestled with the faith that I grew up in for 40 years and then lost totally. Well, this has now crystallised into 'faith' vs. 'works' – hence Galatians.

By 'faith', I (now) mean mainly trusting a Person, getting to know that Person better in any way I can. Yes, 'the faith' is also part of it – the essential core content of what we believe – but faith is primarily about a trusting relationship, not about a very detailed set of beliefs, some of which we might argue about (cf. church history).

And by 'works', I don't just mean 'things we do'. If it were, then how would we make sense of Jesus saying (remember the sheep and goats?) that our avoiding 'eternal punishment' is on the basis of 'works', as in 'what we do unto others'.^[Matt 25]

As Paul in Galatians makes clear, *faith* is about **promise**; *works* is about the **law**. The law – which didn't come until 430 years *after* the promise – held us in slavery, until the promise was fulfilled in Jesus! So, from beginning to end, the whole of God's plan was about **promise**, and the law just was an interim aid (Tom Wright's 'babysitter'^[247]) until we came of age in Christ.

That's why Paul got so cross with the Judaisers: they were going *back* to the law by excluding the Gentiles on the basis of circumcision. Well, not *actually* excluding: 'Yes, the Gentiles *are* welcome in our church, but *only* if they obey the rules and submit to circumcision.'

My eight friends won't agree, of course, but can you see the parallel? Gay people are told that unless they remain celibate they are only *sort-of* welcome – after all, how can people be welcome if they are knowingly immoral?! The Bible makes that rule *very* clear!

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