

SEEKING SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN Sunday School- February 5, 2012

Unifying Topic: JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST

Lesson Text

I. Justification By Faith (Galatians 2:15-17)

II. The Law Of Moses (Galatians 2:18-21)

The Main Thought: For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:19-20, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Having faith in someone else is the greatest gift one can make to another. Why is faith greater than any other gift? Paul stated that Jesus died in vain if we place our faith in anything other than Him.

Lesson Aim: To explore Paul's argument concerning justification by faith.

Life aim: To affirm and deepen the students' faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

HISTORY:

Chapter 1:16-25 —¹Paul has been describing the nature of his relationship with the original apostles in Jerusalem to show that he had been commissioned directly by God, not by the apostles, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He has worked independently from them. In fact, his contact with them has been minimal. He did not visit them until three years after his conversion; and then he spent only two weeks with Peter in Jerusalem in order to get acquainted with him. On that trip to Jerusalem, the only other apostle he saw was James. After that time he remained unknown by face to the churches in Judea. But they kept hearing, "*He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.*" It was a long time before Paul met again with the apostles in Jerusalem.

Chapter 2:1-10 —²Fourteen years after Paul's conversion he goes to Jerusalem to meet with the church leaders seeking to get their endorsement of his ministry to the Gentiles (vv. 1-6). The men who evaluated Paul's ministry were James (the half brother of Jesus), Cephas (Peter) and John who were the main pillars of the Church. After listening to his presentation they recognized that God had given different areas of ministry to different men. In this case there is only one Gospel but two different areas of ministry. James, Peter, and John would go to the Jews of the circumcision (v. 7) and Paul along with Barnabas would go to the Gentiles of the uncircumcision or heathen (vv. 7-9). Only one stipulation was made, and that was that they were to remember the poor, which was the very thing they were eager to do anyway (v. 10).

Compromise is an important element in getting along with others but we should never compromise the truth of God's Word. As a Christian we need to understand that:

- I. Every member in God's family is important.
- II. Everyone is gifted and prompted by the Lord to reach different kinds of people.
- III. Everyone who knows the Lord needs our acceptance.

¹ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/galatians/2_1-10.htm

² <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/galatians-21/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

Chapter 2:11-14 —Apparently, sometime after the conference described in the previous verses, Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch (v. 11). At first he mingled freely with the Gentiles, enjoying their fellowship. Then some men from Jerusalem arrived who were following strict Jewish traditions. They considered those who did not comply with Jewish ceremonial cleanliness and circumcision to be unclean.

Peter was an impulsive man. He could show amazing faith and courage one minute and fail completely the next. Peter who was not afraid to preach the Gospel before unbelievers suddenly becomes fearful of this peer pressure and withdrew from his Gentile friends (v. 12). Not only did he exhibit a hypocritical attitude but he led Barnabas and others astray with him (v. 13). Paul sees this as a threat to Christian freedom, so he confronts Peter about this inconsistency before everyone (*publicly*) (v. 14). By Peter's actions, he was displaying that Christ was not sufficient.

Paul's words must have stung Peter as he said, "*you are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile. The law cannot save us; but after we have become Christians, it can guide us to live as God requires. Now you want the Gentiles to live like Jews. What kind of inconsistency is that?*" Three Biblical principles we can glean from this are:

- I. We are to be accountable to one another.
- II. What we do has an effect on others.
- III. Our commitment to truth cannot be merely intellectual but must be lived.

LESSON:

Galatians 2:15-17 Justification By Faith

2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, — Paul continues by saying, "*We*", meaning, Paul, Peter and Barnabas, and the rest of the Jews at Antioch were Jews by birth, were descended of Jewish parents, and from their infancy were brought up in the Jewish religion, and under the law of Moses, and in the observance of it, with special privileges and prerogatives. "*We*" were the ones brought up as law-keeping Jews, not as law-neglecting Gentiles. The Gentile sinners did not attempt to follow the Old Testament laws. Paul goes on to let Peter know that, "*We*" know better; we weren't guilty of the flagrant and constant neglect of the Jewish dietary laws; the Gentiles neither knew nor kept the rigorous legal requirements of Jewish life, so they were all automatically in the category of "sinners."

2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, —Paul is reminding Peter and the others, that even though they had been Jews, they had to come to Christ through faith, not works. The Judaizers did not believe this. They proclaimed that salvation is done by hard work. That means they observe the law justifying them over Christ justifying them. Why is it that a man can never be justified, nor secure righteousness by works and law? Why is it that a man can never approach God by works and law? Some need to know this. There are two ways that a man can secure righteousness and approach God. He can **try on his works of the law** or he can **believe in Jesus Christ**.

1. A man can do this only if he can keep the law perfectly, never breaking it once and never violating it a single time. Only if he can make sure that every single thing he ever does or thinks is perfectly good and righteous and pure. Only if he can please God in every act, word and thought, never displeasing God in anything. Only if a man can do this can he secure righteousness works and law. However, this is very impossible to do. A person may try, but he can never achieve this kind of perfection! However...
2. A man can do this **by believing that Jesus Christ is God's gift of righteousness to the world**; that God so loved the world, that He gave His Son to live a perfect life upon earth in order to secure the Perfect and Ideal Righteousness for man; that He gave His Son to take the unrighteousness of man upon Himself and to die for man, that is, to bear the judgment of unrighteousness for man; that he gave His Son to arise from the dead for man in order to conquer death, hell, and the grave, and to give man a new and perfect life

that is eternal. A man can believe that God loves him and takes his faith in Christ and counts it as righteousness. A man can believe that God loves him and accepts him because he honors His Son Jesus Christ. And lastly: A man can believe that God loves His Son so much that He will take any man who honors His Son and do anything for him. (*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast"* Eph.2:8-9).

"*Justification*" is the judicial act of God whereby He declares righteous those who trust in Christ. It is the reversal of His attitude toward the sinner because of the sinner's new relationship to Christ. This means that all the guilt and penalty of the believer is removed forever (*Rom.8:1-"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"*). The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to him from the works of the law, not resulting from man's deeds of obedience— **but by the faith of Jesus Christ,** —

Faith is not the ground of justification—grace is! It is not faith in our faith but faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is wholly by divine mercy (Tit.3:5) and not by human merit. **...even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law:** Even the Jews with all their privileges are no better than the Gentiles. Their law was inadequate and insufficient to bring them into a right relationship with God. Therefore, it was necessary for Jews to believe in Christ in order to be justified. **...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.** Since no flesh, Jews or Gentile could ever be justified by the works of the law, how ridiculous it is to bind the burden of law/works on the Gentiles who were already justified by faith in Christ. The order is: knowing, believing, justified.

2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ³It was an admission on the part of Jewish Christians that justification by works proves that they are sinners. Their failure in keeping the law forces them to admit their sinful condition. They did not find righteousness in keeping the law. Paul's answer is brilliant. First, *"yes, we seek to be justified by Christ, and not by Jesus plus our own works."*

⁴It is utterly crucial that you see what Paul is admitting, and what he is denying. He is admitting first that he and Peter and other Jewish Christians are seeking justification not in works of law but only in Christ (*in what Christ did at the cross*). And he is admitting secondly, that in doing this they become "*sinners*." -*Because we cannot keep God's laws perfectly*. Yes, we are found to be "*sinners*" in this sense. That's what he admits.

But he denies emphatically that this makes Christ an agent/minister of sin. Yes, we ourselves also are found sinners, that is, we acknowledge that we still sin even though we stand justified by Christ. But no, this certainly does not make Jesus the author or approver of sin in our lives. If God declares a person right in His eyes by faith, does this make Christians lawless? Legalists argued, *"If Christ does away with the law for salvation and sanctification then that would make Christ lawless."* But Paul denies emphatically that this makes Christ an agent of sin. Why? -Because Christ dealt with the sin issue on the **cross**. Christ is not the agent of sin. He is the agent/minister of freedom; Freedom for God and freedom for love. That's Paul's answer to the Judaizers: Yes, Christ frees us from the works of law; again, no, He is not thereby an agent/minister of sin.

Galatians 2:18-21 The Law Of Moses

2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Paul's answer is that if he were to build again those things which he had torn down, then he would prove himself a transgressor." What had Paul torn down? Paul had torn down the law as a means of justification. Therefore, if he now builds a way to God

³ <http://versebyversecommentary.com/galatians/galatians-217/>

⁴ <http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper83/030683.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would make himself a transgressor. Essentially, Paul says "*There is more sin in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian.*" A "*transgressor*" is someone who crosses over a line or standard. Paul would violate the standard of grace if he reverted to law.

- i. ⁵These certain men from James thought they had to hang on to the Law — for themselves and for Gentiles — so there wouldn't be so much sin. What Paul shows is that by putting themselves under the law again, they are sinning worse than ever!
- ii. How is it a sin to build again a way to God through the Law of Moses? Well, in many ways, but perhaps the greatest is that it looks at Jesus, hanging on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved, bearing the wrath of God for us, and says to Him, "*That's all very nice, but it isn't enough. Your work on the cross won't be good enough before God until I'm circumcised and eat kosher.*" What an insult to the Son of God!
- iii. Of course, this is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be more right with God, they end up being less right with God. This was exactly the situation of the Pharisees that opposed Jesus so much during His years of earthly ministry. Paul knew this thinking well, having been a Pharisee himself (Acts 23:6).

2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, —Paul makes a bold statement, by using himself, saying that "*I have died to the law.*" If he is dead to the law, then it is impossible for the law to be the way he stands accepted by God. It was the law that demanded Christ's death for our sin because God cannot tolerate sin of any kind.

⁶If ever a man tried to be saved by keeping the law, it was Paul. Philippians 3 tells us how hard he worked to earn God's favor. He was a "*Hebrew of the Hebrews,*" a trained Pharisee, a learned doctor of the law, and a man zealous to keep every commandment so that he might earn God's favor. He was far beyond his contemporaries in terms of outward obedience. If salvation came by keeping the rules, Paul had it made. He was going to heaven for sure. Then he met Christ and everything changed. Once Christ transformed his life, he looked back at his self-righteous law keeping and concluded that it was dung compared with the joy of knowing Christ personally. All those things he tried to do to commend himself to God utterly failed. They failed not because they were bad but because they could not change his heart. Outward obedience can never change human nature. Paul needed something the law could not provide—he needed a new heart. The law put him to death in the sense that it left him utterly condemned and guilty in the eyes of God. It proved him to be a sinner but it could not provide new life.

Not only are we dead through the law, we are dead to the law. "*To die to the law is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it and it does not hold us captive under the yoke of slavery.*" (Calvin).

...that I might live unto God —What the law could not do, Christ has done for us. Rule keeping produces guilt and leaves us dead in the road. But when Christ enters, we find new life. To be alive to God means that we no longer live for self but instead we live for God's glory. Once you come to Christ, you're a brand-new person. You can never go back to the old person you used to be. You can try, but you won't like it. You won't be happy. You won't be satisfied.

A believer is justified by living for God. He lives for God by doing four things.

1. **The believer lives for God by dying to the law.** The law shows a man that he is a sinner and that he comes ever so short of perfection and righteousness.

Paul thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But he came to the point where he really understood the law — understanding it in the way Jesus explained it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) — and Paul realized that the law made him guilty before God, not justified before God. The law has no remedy for sin, Jesus

⁵ <http://new.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?bk=47&ch=2&vs=undefined>

⁶ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2001-06-10-How-God-Saves-Sinners-Coming-to-Grips-with-Justification-by-Faith/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

does. The law cannot bring life because no one ever lived up to the law except Jesus Christ. ⁷When Paul died to the law, then he could live to God because the law lost all its claims on him. As long as he still tried to justify himself before God, by all his law-keeping, he was dead. But when he died to the law, then he could live to God and you can't arrest a dead man. We can live to God because we have new life in Christ.

2:20 I am crucified with Christ: This is not a literal crucifixion on the cross. This is the symbolism of Crucifixion. "*Crucifixion*" was death by torture; Painful (excruciating, "*on the cross*"). Paul speaks of a real death that can be excruciating as we put our "*old man; our old nature*" to death for the sake of Christ. Christ is Lord over the Law, because He was crucified unto the Law. Death was Paul's one chance of escape from the penalty of the law. The only way to be acceptable to God is to die to the law. By my faith in Christ I am crucified with Christ. I have been delivered from the Law. I am crucified and dead unto the Law. God takes that; my faith and...

- counts my faith as me having died in Christ.
- counts my faith as identification with Christ in death.
- counts my faith as me having already been punished for sin through Christ's Crucifixion.

But **...nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:** He's saying that he's not literally dead but spiritually alive because Christ is in charge of his life. It is Christ living by means of the Holy Spirit in him. It is crucial to understand this point. Christ does not live His life through us but we live His life when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. Believers see themselves living in a state of dependence on Christ; no longer to the law. **...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.** — So Paul living in the flesh does not live after the flesh anymore. Why? Because God gave His life for him; for us, therefore, it's no longer I who's living inside, but it's really Christ living in me and by the power of the Holy Spirit. How? It was something that God did for him and for us. Paul cannot take credit for his crucifixion. ⁸Paul placed his faith in the Son of God, that is, His divine Sonship. Paul's new life is faith-based, not flesh-based. Faith is the link that binds Paul to Christ. Instead of attempting to measure up to the law, Paul lives his new life in Christ by faith. The Lord's love and sacrifice motivates us to live for Him.

2. The believer lives for God by being crucified with Christ.
3. The believer lives for God by allowing Christ to live His life through his body.

2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. The word "*frustrate*" (*atheto*) means to set aside, void, invalidate, make ineffective, or nullify. Therefore, if we go back to the law, we cancel out the work of the cross. ⁹To nullify grace would be to put one's trust, not in salvation as God's free gift, but in one's own efforts. To do this is to reject grace altogether; relying on one's puny effort means that one nullifies that grace." (*Morris*)

4. The believer lives for God by trusting the grace of God, that is, by trusting Jesus Christ who is God's righteousness.

The Judaizers wanted to mix law and grace, but Paul told us that this is impossible. To go back to the law means to set aside the grace of God. If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. The law was our schoolmaster to reveal to us how badly we needed a Saviour. Christ gave His body on the cross that we might live. He purchased our salvation with His precious blood. He quickens our spirit to eternal life in Him. Returning to the law nullifies the cross. Law says do; Grace says done! It is finished! Therefore, Christ did not die in vain.

⁷ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8028&commInfo=31&topic=Galatians&ar=Gal_2_17

⁸ <http://versebyversecommentary.com/galatians/galatians-220e/>

⁹ <http://new.studydrive.org/com/guz/view.cgi?bk=47&ch=2&vs=undefined>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

SUMMARY:

¹⁰The basis of salvation is the issue in this passage. Is salvation through Christ alone or does it come through Christ and adherence to the law? If observing the Jewish laws cannot justify us, why should we still obey the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament laws? Paul says we are Jews by birth and are not like Gentiles. But we know that God accepts only those who have faith in Jesus Christ, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. No one can please God by simply obeying the law. So we put our faith in Christ Jesus, and God accepted us because of our faith (v. 15-16). As Paul will explain later in this letter, the law was given to reveal sin and not to redeem from sin (Rom. 3:20).

Christ does not make us sinners (v. 17). Paul's argument to Peter was that we did not find salvation through the law; we found it through faith in Christ. Furthermore, by going back into legalism, you are building up what you tore down (v. 18). It was the law itself that killed me and faith freed me from its power, so that I could live for God (v. 19). I have been nailed to the cross with Christ. I have died, but Christ lives in me (v. 20). And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. I don't turn my back on God's undeserved kindness (v. 21). If we can be acceptable to God by obeying the Law, it was useless for Christ to die. Believers today may still be in danger of acting as if Christ died for nothing.

APPLICATION:

God has provided a way of salvation that depends on Jesus Christ and not my own efforts. Even though I know this truth, I must guard against the temptation of using service, good deeds, charitable giving, or any other effort as a substitute for faith.

When we believe in the death of Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, we in effect destroy the law as a system of salvation. If we revert to the law, we rebuild as a system of salvation. If we choose both the law and grace as systems of salvation, we restrict both of them.

¹⁰ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/salvation-is-not-of-the-law/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>