

The importance of Faith

Galatians 3:6-14

The early church had a saying,

“In essentials, law, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things love.”

Three Tiers:

Dogma (Essentials)

Doctrine (Non-essentials)

Opinion (preferences, local or cultural practices, or tastes)

If someone held to a specific belief that they had to eat fish on Friday, that would be either a non-essential or a personal preference. But if they claimed that it was a requirement for salvation, then it would be a serious issue.

The doctrine of justification by faith is an essential, non-negotiable truth.

When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved, Paul answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Paul writes,

“...A man is not justified by the works of the law
but through faith in Christ Jesus...” (Rom. 2:16)

To be ***justified*** is to be declared righteous in God’s sight.

The Scriptural point of Paul’s text is

that a man is not justified by any works of the law
and that he is justified by faith in Christ.

Such was the conclusion of the Reformation of the 15th century.

The reformation was a time when the Roman church was selling salvation to raise money that they needed for building St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome.

It was called indulgences.

Peter Hammond in *The Greatest Century of Reformation* writes,

The center of medieval Roman Catholic church life was the Mass, the Sacrament of the altar. The Roman Catholic institution placed much emphasis on the punishment of sin in Purgatory, as a place of cleansing by fire before the faithful were deemed fit to enter heaven. They taught that there were four sacraments that dealt with the forgiveness and the removal

of sin, and the cancellation of its punishment: Baptism, the Mass, Penance and Extreme Unction. The heart of Penance was the priestly act of Absolution whereby the priest pardoned the sins and released the penitent from eternal punishment. Upon the words of Absolution whereby the priest, the penitent sinner received the forgiveness of sins, release from eternal punishment and restoration to a state of grace. This would require the sinner making some satisfaction, by saying a prescribed number of prayers, by fasting, by giving alms, by going on a pilgrimage, or by taking part in a crusade.”

Hammond continues,

In time, the medieval church had come to allow the penitent to substitute the payment of a sum of money for other forms of penalty or satisfaction. The priest could then issue an official statement, an indulgence, declaring the release from other penalties through the payment of money. In time, the catholic church came to allow indulgences to be bought, not only for oneself, but also for relatives and friends who had died and passed into Purgatory. They claimed that these indulgences would shorten the time that would otherwise had to be spent suffering in Purgatory....”¹

When Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk and indulgence salesman extraordinaire, arrived in Saxony, “the shameless and scandalous manner in which Tetzel hawked the indulgences outraged Martin Luther. Sales jingles such as: *‘As soon as the coin clinks in the chest, a soul flies up to Heavenly rest’* were deceiving gullible people about their eternal souls.”²

Luther’s study of Scripture had convinced him that salvation came by the grace of God alone, based upon the atonement of Christ on the cross alone, received by faith alone. Indulgences could not remove any guilt, and could only induce a false sense of security. People were being deceived for eternity.³

On October 31, 1517 Luther took his stand nailing his “95 Thesis” against indulgences to the Wittenberg Castle church door. People would be coming from all over to see the over 5000 relics exhibited in the Schlosskirche, which had been built specifically for the purpose of housing the massive collection. Luther’s protest greatly interfered with the intended sales that accompanied

¹ Peter Hammond, *The Greatest Century of Reformation*, (South Africa: Christian Liberty Books, 2006) Pp. 45-46.

² Hammond, p. 47.

³ Ibid.

the exhibition. When Luther was on trial before the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, the examiner said that he was to give a simple answer: *recant or not*. Luther's response: "Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by clear reasoning that I am in error – for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves – I cannot recant, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen."⁴

Justification by faith is one of the essentials of Christianity. For this essential truth Paul takes his stand in his letter to the Galatian churches.

In Chapter Three Paul begins:

"O Foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (Gal. 3:1)

They had swallowed the lies of false teachers who taught that salvation was by faith and the works of the law. Paul then exposes their misinterpretations.

Paul's primary argument: 1). What true biblical faith does.
2). What works cannot do.

Paul appeals to two witnesses:

Abraham and the Law.

1. Abraham

⁶Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. ⁷Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you. ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

(Gal. 3:6-9)

Abraham is the primary patriarch of all Jews and called the 'Father of Faith.' He becomes Paul's illustration of true biblical faith.

No doubt the Judaizers had also used Abraham as proof that circumcision was necessary to please God and become acceptable to Him. Gal. 5:1-12 shows this to be a major concern among the churches at Galatia and the early church.

⁴ Hammond, 53.

The Jerusalem Council was prompted by the same discussion:

“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’... some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.’” (Acts 15:1, 5).

The council’s conclusion settled the issue of salvation for both Jew and Gentile.

“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:11).

Paul also concluded:

“Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (Gal. 5:2-4).

When Abraham was first called by God to leave Ur of Chaldea God said to him, “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2-3).

Later on Abraham and his descendants were commanded to be circumcised as a sign of God’s covenant and constant illustration of the need for spiritual cleansing from sin: “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised” (Gen. 17:10).

The logic of the Judaizers that put these two accounts together was simple: *“Since the Gentiles share in the blessings of Abraham, doesn’t it follow that they should first take on the sign that marks God’s people, the Jews?”*

The first problem with their logic is that Abraham was declared to be righteous because of his faith 24 years before he was circumcised.⁵

⁵ See chronology of events from Gen. 12-17.

This is the essential argument Paul makes in Romans:

“Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.’ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which had while uncircumcised.” (Rom. 4:9-12)

Paul is saying that Abraham is the father all who are of faith, Jew and Gentile.

Paul’s logic to the Galatians:

- **It was by faith that Abraham was made righteous.**

...Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness

- **Gentiles, who were not descendants of Abraham, would also be justified by faith.**

...God would justify the Gentiles by faith

“But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness...”

Rom. 4:5

- **Abraham’s offspring aren’t physical descendants, but are of faith.**

⁷Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham...⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal. 3:7, 9).

2. The Law

Believers are justified by faith and not by the Law

“For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse;
 for it is written ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things
 written in the book of the law, to perform them.’
 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for,
 ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’
 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary,
 ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’”
 (Gal. 3:10-12)

After showing what faith can do, Paul now shows what works cannot do.
 Through faith came the blessings of Abraham,
 but through the Law comes a curse.

The rabbis believed that if a man kept the law, when he died God would owe him salvation and then some. However, Paul writes that everyone who is under the works of the Law is under a curse.

- **A curse**
 ...as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse... v. 10

Paul then quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26

‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the
 book of the law, to perform them.’

Curse: a divine judgment that brings the sentence of condemnation.

Abide by all things... - those who trust in their works
 must keep all things, and that without exception.

Is there any man alive who can perfectly keep God’s Law?

If men proudly insist on living by the law, it will curse them, not save them,
 because they cannot possibly live up to it..

Paul wrote about reaching his fellow Jews.

“For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in
 accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s
 righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject

themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

(Rom. 10:2-4)

The Law cannot save; it only curses because no one can keep it.

Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident;
for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’ (Gal. 3:11)

MacArthur writes,

“Consequently, they unwittingly placed themselves under God’s wrath rather than His blessing, because they could not live up to His law and they would not submit to His grace.”⁶

In trying to be justified by the Law the message is always the same:

- it cannot be done because we cannot keep it.

“Perfection allows no exceptions, no failure of the smallest sort.
To break the law in one place is to break it all.”

James writes,

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10).

“A ship that is moored to a dock by a chain is only as secure as the weakest link in that chain. If a severe storm comes and causes even one link to break, the entire ship breaks away. So it is for those who try to come to God by their own perfection. They will be lost and forever wrecked.”

“For by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight.”

Rom. 3:20

John Wesley wrote:

“Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself,’ but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that He loved me and gave Himself for me.”

⁶ John MacArthur, MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987) p. 77.

Faith makes: The uplook good, the outlook bright, the future glorious.