

Galatians 2: 15 and 16; “Even We have Believed in Christ”, Message # 10 in the series – “Christ has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall, on July 10th, 2013, at the church.

In our last study we saw that the Apostle Peter fell into hypocrisy over the issue of whether he as a Jew should freely associate with the Gentile Christians at Antioch, in eating his meals together with them. And more specifically, the issue which revealed Peter’s hypocrisy was his sinful fear in relation to certain men who had come to Antioch from James in Jerusalem, while he was visiting Antioch. These men evidently wrongly believed that the works of the law and some of the Jewish ordinances such as circumcision and observing the Jewish feast days and Sabbaths were going to continue to be observed all during the Church age, as something which needed to be added to faith in Christ. And so, since that was the case, the supposed social and spiritual superiority of the Jews in relation to these “outsiders”, the Gentiles, would be maintained and upheld. And the evidence of Peter’s having believed in this supposed superiority was his not eating with the Gentiles, at least while these Jews of the party of the circumcision from Jerusalem were there. The Gentiles in what they ate, according the Jewish law, were considered “unclean”. And so these men from James, who were zealous for the law of the Old Testament, were still zealous for maintaining these distinctions. But what they had forgotten, or what they did not know, was that when Christ came into the world, he came to fulfill the law, and in fulfilling the law, the reasons for the Jews being a distinct and separate people spiritually, in Christ had disappeared. Thus Peter fell into hypocrisy. Therefore, here in these verses that we are studying tonight, the Apostle Paul wanted to show the people in the churches of Galatia that even those who were Jews by nature must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they might be justified in God’s sight. The gospel is the same for both Jews and Gentiles. This evening we want to look 1st at the phrase “Jews by nature”. And 2nd – the phrase “justified by faith in Jesus Christ”. And 3rd – The phrase “by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”. **1st, then, Let’s look at the phrase – “Jews by nature”.**

Verse 15 says, “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles.” We need to ask ourselves the question tonight, “Who was the first Jew, and what was God’s purpose in calling them to be a distinct and separate people from all the peoples of the earth? Turn with me over to Genesis Chapter 12, verse 1. “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.’ “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.” “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Look also up at verse 31 of Chapter 11 – “And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.” Now, we can see that God’s call came directly to Abram; Abram most definitely hearing the voice of God to His mind and soul, and he then communicated these words of promise to His relatives after he had heard it, and they believed also. He was told by God to get out of his native country, and to leave his father’s house, and go to the land of Canaan. And then God in the process of time would make him and his descendants after him “a great nation”; that is, that He would make them into a great ethnic nation, and eventually a great political nation as well. Abraham’s call was a spiritual call with national and ethnic implications which would continue down through time, even down through to this very day. For in him, that is in Abraham, “all the families of the earth would be blessed”.

Now turn over to Genesis 14, verse 13. The context here is the land of Canaan. And 4 of the kings of the land were waging war on the other 5 kings of the land. In the process of this war,

Abraham's nephew Lot, who was dwelling in Sodom, was taken captive by the 4 kings. And so in verse 11 it says, "Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way." "They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed." "Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram." This is the first mention in the Bible of the name "Hebrew" in relation to the Jewish people. Although some believe that Abram received this ethnic title from Eber or Heber who lived six generations before Abraham and was a godly man, it does not seem apparent to me that this is where the name came from. I think that it seems rather to have come from the meaning of the word in the Hebrew itself, (Haibri), which means "from beyond the river". And if you will turn over with me to Joshua Chapter 24, you will find good indications that this is correct. In verse 2, Joshua says to all the tribes of Israel – "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.'" "Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac."

You can clearly see here, that God's intention was to not only call Abram geographically away from the site of his pagan worship in Ur of the Chaldeas, but his purpose was also to begin a whole new nation of people, through Abraham, whose physical descendant Isaac, descended from his own loins, would be the child of promise to him; the first in a long line of physical descendants which would eventually issue in the coming of the Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. All those people descended from Abraham through Isaac are Hebrews; they are those who have come from "beyond the river" Euphrates in their geographic call from God, to separate from all false religion, and live in the land of Canaan. That's where their ethnic identity, and the beginnings of their spiritual identity had its beginnings. Even so, those Jewish or Gentile persons who are spiritually called of God to inherit the blessings of the promises given to Abraham, all of them will obey the call to repent (take leave of their sinful Pagan and worldly practices) and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Each person who considers themselves a Christian should ask themselves in all seriousness whether they have really heard the call of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is to leave off all of our former manner of life; all the sensual partying of the unbelieving Pagan (1 Peter 4: 1-3), and also to put away from themselves all the false religious practices of those who trust in their ceremonial religious works of whatever religion they have formerly belonged to. This is what all religious unbelievers attempt to practice consistently to justify their assertion that they know God. With them, it is all of works. And they will attempt to find acceptance with God in that way of going to church, or mosque, or synagogue which their own thoughts approve of, rather than listening to the specific call of God in His Word the Bible. God would have all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. He would have them to leave their present sinful lifestyle, and false worship, behind. The call to the person who would be a true Christian is to be crucified to the world. Galatians 6: 14. "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."

Now 2^{ndly} - Let's look together at the phrase "justified by faith in Jesus Christ".

Verse 16 – "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...." You can see here that faith in Jesus Christ is the one and only thing necessary unto a person's being justified in the sight of God. A person simply cannot be justified by the works of the law, either moral or ceremonial. The reason for this is that God is looking for, and expecting a perfect obedience, from His creature man, to His holy law. Turn with me over to James

Chapter 2, verse 10 – “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” So you can see that even if a person is a very moral person and could keep all the commandments of God except one, he must perish; because in not keeping the one, he is found guilty of not keeping all. The law is like a mirror. If one corner of it is broken, the whole mirror is broken. The whole mirror must be replaced. Even so with ourselves. Since we have broken at least one commandment, our whole state before God is one of guilt, and we are underneath His righteous Divine wrath. No, God must have a perfect righteousness from someone, either you or a substitute in order to declare that person righteous, or to justify him. The word “justified” in this verse is “dikaioutai” in the Greek. It means to declare righteous, to vindicate, to treat as just; to acquit or to make free. The term is a legal or forensic one. God is able to declare sinners righteous based upon the righteousness of one who stood perfectly righteous in the sinner’s place. Jesus’ obedience was perfect. He also endured the punishment which was due to their sins. Justification is a doctrine which includes both the Father’s imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner, and the Father’s choosing not to remember the sins which that person has committed when they are confessed, and when Christ is confessed with the mouth of the sinner to be their substitute. This declaration by God, concerning the sinner, takes place when the sinner first believes.

Turn with me over to Acts 13, verses 39-41. “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you.” “Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish!” “For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.” Here are set forth for us the 2 doctrines which make up the doctrine of Justification; forgiveness of sins, and being declared righteous by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Notice how a person under the Old Covenant, could have some things change in their legal status as a result of animal sacrifices being offered up in place of their having to suffer. But these Old Testament sacrifices in themselves could not really take away the guilt of sins or purge the conscience of those who offered them. Therefore there was no way that those sins could be forgiven, unless the person had faith in the Messiah who was coming. Abraham was justified, in the Old Testament times, because he had this faith. Turn over to Romans 4, verse 2-8. “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” “For what does the Scripture say?” “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt.” “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.” “Blessed are those who lawless deeds are forgiven, and who sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” How wonderful it is not to have to work for our salvation. How blessed a thing it is when our sins are all forgiveness and the guilt of the them is all covered, and we are clothed in spiritual garment of a perfect righteousness; even Christ’s.

Then 3rd – Let’s think about the phrase “by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”.

Verse 16 says: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” It is so very important that you and I close this message by thinking about the attitude of faith in relation to finding favor with God and being justified by Him. There is always a certain amount of pride which surrounds those who believe that they are keeping God’s law when all the time they are actually falling far short of it. You and I do not want that. So let turn in closing to Luke

18: 9-14. “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.’” “I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” “And the tax collector standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner!’” “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Let us determine in our hearts, that we are only sinners apart from Christ, and then by His precious and powerful grace, He will save us and keep us. For He alone is the Lord our Righteousness. That we believe; that Jesus only has kept the law and fulfilled it on our behalf. Jesus only has suffered for our sins. And therefore justification is by faith in Him alone, apart from the works of the law.