

**Galatians 2: 15 and 16; “Even We have Believed”, Message # 10 in the series –  
“Christ has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul  
Rendall, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 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, they wrongly that 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 social 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 relation to what they ate, were considered “unclean” according to the Mosaic ceremonial law. 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 when he maintained this false distinction. Therefore, the Apostle Paul wanted to show the people in the churches of Galatia that even those who were Jews by nature must believe in Jesus Christ in order that they might be justified in God’s sight. The gospel is the same for both Jews and Gentiles.

**1<sup>st</sup> , 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 – “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 wife and his relatives after he had heard it, and some of them believed also. He was told by God to get out of his native country, to leave his father’s house, and go to the land of Canaan. He was told that God, in the process of time, would make him and his descendants after him “a great nation”. That is, God would make them into a great ethnic nation, and eventually He would make them into 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 rather it seems 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 Chaldees, 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. He would be 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, began. 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 sinful former manner of life; all the sensual partying of the unbelieving Pagan (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4: 1-3). They should also ask themselves whether they have put away 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; that way which their own thoughts approve of, rather than listening to the specific call of God in His Word the Bible to come to Christ.

God would have all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. He would have every person 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; that is to be crucified to the world's view of religion and what it means to know God, and to have eternal life. The Christian boasts in Christ's cross, not in their own thoughts about life, not in their own works to find favor with God. 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<sup>nd</sup> – 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; to your being declared righteous, 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. He really does expect that you will go about to keep His holy law. Think about James Chapter 2, verse 10. “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” So what this is saying is that even if a person is a very moral person, and they could keep all the commandments of God except one, they must perish because of that one sin. In not keeping that one, they found guilty of not keeping them 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. It is even so with ourselves. Since we have broken more than one commandment, and that many times over, our whole state before God is one of guilt. We are underneath His righteous Divine wrath from our birth because of Adam’s sin in the Beginning. But we confirm his one sin by our having committed many sins. No, God must have a perfect righteousness from you. If He cannot find it in you, He must find it someone else; a substitute in order to declare you righteous, to justify you.

The word “justified” in this verse is “dikaioutai” (di-kai-ou-ti) 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 a sinner 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 our sins. The doctrine of Justification is a doctrine which includes both the Father’s imputing 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. Your confession is of your need for Christ Himself to be your substitute. This declaration by God, that you are to be seen as righteous in God’s sight, takes place when you first believe.

Turn with me over to Acts 13, verses 39-41. The apostle Paul is preaching the gospel here to his Jewish countrymen, and he says – “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.”

So, here in these verses are set forth 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 really have some things change in their legal status before God as a result of animal sacrifices being offered up in place of their having to suffer. They could be ceremonially clean. But that is as far as it went. These Old Testament sacrifices in themselves could not really take away the guilt of sins, neither could they purge the conscience of those who offered them. Therefore there was no way that those sins could really be forgiven, unless the person had faith in the Messiah who was coming.

Abraham was justified, in Old Testament times, because he had this faith in the Christ who was coming. 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 whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” How wonderful a thing it is, then, not to have to work for your salvation. How blessed a thing it is when all of your sins are all forgiven, and the guilt of them is all covered; when you are clothed with a spiritual garment of Christ’s perfect righteousness. This enables you to walk with God by faith in Him.

**Then 3<sup>rd</sup> – 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 I close this message by having you think together with me about the attitude of faith in relation to your finding favor with God and being justified by Him. Sometimes there is, in a believer, a subtle form of pride that may exist in their heart and mind, when they look at themselves and they think that, on their own, apart from the grace of Christ, that they are perfectly keeping God’s law, when actually, if the truth were known, they are still falling short of God’s expectation of perfection. You should not cultivate this attitude as a Christian. For it is the basis of self-righteousness. You will want to learn to be humble in relation to your own righteousness and our own evaluation of our attainments as a Christian.

Let me read for you 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 to 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.”

And also, remember the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3: 7-11 – “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from by faith.” Paul said this as a believer. He said this so that you and I would not be cultivating self-righteousness in our hearts, but that we would by faith be always found in Christ; always trying to “win” Him, even though we have Him. My brothers and sisters, let us determine in our hearts, that the way that we will view ourselves is that we are only sinners apart from Christ. He alone is the Lord our Righteousness. We believe that Jesus alone kept the law perfectly, and fulfilled it perfectly on our behalf. He alone has suffered for our sins. And therefore justification is by faith in Him alone, apart from the works of the law. We will not boast in ourselves.