

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Eight

Galatians

Justified by Faith

(John 5:39; Galatians 2:16)

With Study Questions

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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 (Galatians 2:16).

Preface

Having studied, I generally put forth an introduction of personal application. A truth is singular, but applications can be many. For example, a singular truth may be that love is sacrificial. The applications of sacrificial love are numerous.

The goal of my introduction in a sermon generally revolves around how what I studied either comforted, challenged or otherwise sanctified my thinking or actions when it comes to the things of God. First and foremost, a sanctified heart will find the application is a heart more inclined to worship.

From there it should extend to the whole of our being. I do believe this should be the lifelong quest of the Christian. It should be the historic quest of all creation.

Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:19)!

Introduction

After studying Galatians, one thing that rose to the fore in my thinking was how the impetus for Paul's writing of this epistle was Christ's church (and Paul himself) being disturbed by troublemakers. I was reminded of an essay in a Christian periodical I read years ago entitled *Our Debt to*

Heresy. In short, the article chronicled how so many of our great creeds, confessions and catechisms were a result of heresies infiltrating the church.

Many of those heresies lost their momentum due to the work of the early church. In a sense, those early heresies worked like a vaccine. Enough of the disease is injected that the body might ward off future infections. The modern church is much more highly susceptible to infections having dismissed the work of these early saints and their creeds, confessions and catechisms. Heresies these days are not as easily spotted. Nonetheless, God has a way of transforming our own infractions into His most powerful remedies.

Perhaps the most beautiful and powerful expressions of God's love and forgiveness in Scripture came about due to deplorable human failure. Can anyone site a richer expression than Psalm 51 when it comes to blotting away our sins and restoring the joy of our salvation? Yet the sin which drove this glorious Psalm was dark and deep.

At a personal level, the events which were most sanctifying for me and, by extension for our church, came as a result of those who brought the most pain and heartache. Thorns hurt. They are not generally concerned with our welfare. But God is. And it is He who controls the thorns. Speaking of that thorn in the flesh, that messenger of Satan, Calvin wrote:

I answer, that Satan, in accordance with his disposition and custom, had nothing else in view than to kill and to destroy, and that the goad, that Paul makes mention of, was dipt in deadly poison; but that it was a special kindness from the Lord, to render medicinal what was in its own nature deadly.

May God give us grace to appreciate His special kindness in all our difficulties. It was difficulties brought by troublers that brought Paul to write this epistle with large letters in his own hand (Galatians 6:11); something that must have not come easy.

Survey of Galatians

The topic of this epistle is the life-support of the church. It is not hyperbolic to say that the understanding of the Christian faith these Galatian churches were beginning to embrace would render the death of Christ a vanity.

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:21).

There was a real threat that they would lose the gospel; a threat Paul would not countenance for a moment. He wrote of the lies and the liars who brought them.

to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2:5).

And the lie was not that there was no gospel. Nor was the lie that Christ had no part of the gospel. What they were hearing and beginning to adopt was

different gospel (Galatians 1:6)

which rendered it not a gospel at all. It was not, at least here, the world but the church that had been

bewitched...fallen from grace...hindered...from obeying the truth (Galatians 3:1; 5:4, 7).

Paul's indignation is almost uncomfortable to read. It is with self-mutilation in mind that he writes:

I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off (Galatians 5:12)!

Clearly the error is great! But before we engage this great error, let us examine the darkened fountains from which great errors spring. Paul will make a distinction here between who he is as a man and who he is as an apostle. It is with holy respect for God's holy word that Paul will write.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

Spiritual death erupts when the word of God is dismissed or supplanted. And these eruptions of both church and the individuals in the church come, not (so much) from missiles from the sky but rumbling tectonic plates beneath the church's own soil.

And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage) (Galatians 2:4).

What is this great sin designed to rob the Christian of liberty and bring them into bondage? What is this unendurable error that carries anathema (a curse) to the teacher and, potentially, to his students? The heart of the message is found in one verse.

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 (Galatians 2:16).

Martin Luther called *justification* the doctrine by which

the church either stands or falls.

Calvin declared it the

hinge of the Reformation.

There is nothing you will learn in any church at any time which surpasses this message-this good news-this gospel. In short, a sinful person is justified (declared righteous) before the holy Triune God by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law (that is, anything we can do, say or think).

We must be aware that these accursed heresies are shrewd enough to avoid dismissing Christ altogether. To them, the atoning work of Christ played a significant, albeit insufficient, role. But the argument of Paul, an

argument which resurfaced in the Reformation, was that it is Christ alone who saves.

By faith we rest upon Him alone for justification (declared righteous), sanctification (being made holy), and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. Paul's dismantling of these bondage-making heretics amounts to this: Christ plus nothing equals everything-Christ plus something equals nothing. Or to use the words of Scripture, "**Christ will profit you nothing**" (Galatians 5:2b).

His greatest detractors were those who were convinced that their ethnicity/lineage to Abraham placed them in a superior religious stratum. Strikes me in a similar manner when I witness to a friend who tells me their uncle is a pastor. As if their religion is covered by virtue of blood or marriage. Paul will not have people secure a false hope in their descendancy.

Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

A common objection to this lawless gospel is that people can live like hell on the sweet cruise to heaven. But interestingly enough, this 'superior' works oriented false gospel was causing flagrant, ill behavior. They were biting and devouring one another (Galatians 5:15). There is nothing that will yield more loving, gracious and obedient children than the knowledge that they themselves are the recipients, the beneficiaries, of a loving, gracious and obedient Savior.

If I think I have something to offer God to earn or merit His love-if that is my method of thinking-it naturally follows that I will withhold my own love until it is merited by others. This is a worldly love. Jesus taught:

**But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?
For even sinners love those who love them (Luke 6:32).**

To summarize, the first two chapters of Galatians tend to be *personal*. The apostle is presenting his authority and credentials.

Chapters three and four are highly *doctrinal*. Sinners are declared righteous before a holy God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone who they know by the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone.

Chapters five and six focus on the *practical*. This great freedom we have in Christ should not be a license for sin.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:7, 8).

Law and bondage are replaced by love and service. Through love we serve one another. True Spirit-given faith produces Spirit-given fruit. The fruit does not save us, but it does reveal what kind of tree we are.

Questions for Study

1. Are there distinctions between the truth found in Scripture and the applications? Explain (page 2)?
2. What are you hoping your study of God's word will produce in you (page 2)?
3. How does God transform human failure into redemptive fruit (pages 2, 3)?
4. Give reasons that creeds, confessions and catechisms are of value (page 3).
5. Why was Paul so intense about the errors invading the churches of Galatia (page 4)?
6. What is the initial error that begins to destroy a church (pages 4, 5)?
7. What is the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls and why (pages 5, 6)?
8. Why and how does a proper understanding of God's grace produce greater love in Christians (pages 6, 7)?