**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

**GALATIANS 2:15 TO 3:5**

[Review of last week’s lesson] Discuss Paul’s rebuke of Peter – why did Paul do this? The wrong message Peter was sending, whether it was intentional or not, was that there is a clear distinction between Jew and Gentile, that good Jews don’t associate with Gentiles. The problem with this is that in Christ such distinctions no longer exist. Earthly barriers such as race, gender, national origin and skin color have been done away with. The cross of Christ bridges the gap between people groups. It tears down the man-made walls of prejudice. One of the great verses from Paul’s letter to the Galatians is at the end of Chapter 3, v 28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

As we get started this morning I want to re-read Paul’s statement to Peter. It will be the premise upon which Paul bases his theology related to the doctrine of justification.

READ Galatians 2:15-16

There is absolutely no question where Paul stands on this issue. So what is the Biblical doctrine of justification? Let me summarize it for you this way: it is the good news that sinful men and women, no matter who we are, can be brought into the acceptance of God – into a relationship with Him – not by our own merit, but simply by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. That’s the doctrine of justification. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile you are justified before God the same way. Not by the works of the Law, but by faith in Christ. Nobody is justified before God on the basis of the works they do.

The word “justify” is a legal term. To justify is to declare someone as “NOT GUILTY.” In the Bible, justification refers to God's free and gracious act by which He makes a sinner right with Him, forgiving him, pardoning him and accepting him not on the basis of anything that sinner does but solely on the perfect work of Jesus Christ.

OK, so let’s start from the beginning. The great human dilemma is this: God is righteous and I am sinful. How, then, do I get to God? That's what Bildad asked in Job 25:4 – “How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?” That was the problem that was eating at him. How can a sinful man be declared righteous and accepted by a holy and perfect God, by the Creator of the universe? How? We know the answer. We’ve read our New Testament. It is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, Peter and the false teachers in Galatia had confused this fact in their association with their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ, making them feel like second-rate Christians; making them think that maybe they needed to do something else to be a full-fledged Christians. Paul goes on the attack against this wrong way of thinking.

READ Galatians 2:17

The “we” in verse 17 is the same as the “we” in verse 15. It refers to those, like Paul and Peter and Barnabas -- Jewish Christians. Paul's argument goes like this: If our practice of Christian liberty, specifically the eating and fellowshipping together with Gentiles is wrong, making us sinners because we did so, then does this also make Jesus Christ a sinner? After all – read the Gospels – Jesus regularly sat down and ate with tax collectors and sinners (Gentiles). And He was harshly criticized by the Jewish leaders for doing so. Jesus taught, “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” (Matthew 15:11) Jesus also said that “all that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.” (John 6:37) So then, Paul’s point is that when we Jews eat with Gentiles and accept Gentiles and embrace a free grace salvation and we teach faith as the only way to God, we are obeying Christ. But to agree with what the false teachers were saying (that to be a Christian requires that a Gentile must behave like a Jew), then one must conclude that what Jesus Christ taught was wrong. In effect you’re saying that Jesus is “a servant of sin.”

Now Paul applies this whole argument to himself.

READ Galatians 2:18

In other words, Paul says, “I would prove myself a sinner if I forsook the law, established grace, accepted grace, and then turned back to the law. If I did that I would be a hypocrite and a sinner!” But Paul couldn’t do that. He couldn't go back to his former Jewish mindset, his old way of thinking. And why not? Here's why…

READ Galatians 2:19

“I can't do it. I can't go back to the law. I’ve come to grace! I've come to God thru faith! I can't go back to a system of legalism.” Something happens when we get saved. It changes our whole way of thinking. We view the world differently. We look at people, at sin, at life in a whole new way. Coming to Christ changes our ambitions, our thoughts, our desires, our passions, our goals, our priorities, and our attitudes. Or it should.

The law had a purpose. It showed Paul that he was a sinner. The law revealed to him that there was no good thing in him. So the law had real value, but it could not save Paul. It couldn’t justify him. It couldn’t provide him the righteousness required in order to be accepted by God. That could only come thru Jesus Christ. Thru the law there was only condemnation and death. Thru Jesus Christ comes justification and eternal life.

The law, then, revealed that all of us are sinners. And according to Romans 6:23 the penalty for our sin is death; which leads to Galatians 2:20…

READ Galatians 2:20

Are you a Christian? Have you been born again? If so, you died 2000 years ago on the cross. In a spiritual sense, you were there. That’s when Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sin.

Let me interject a point that needs to be made about the whole doctrine of justification. The primary argument by the false teachers in Paul's day and by the legalists of our day to our “faith alone in Christ” salvation goes something like this: “Your doctrine of justification by faith is dangerous. By eliminating the Law, you also eliminate a man's sense of moral responsibility. If a person can be counted as righteous simply by believing that Jesus died for him, then why should he bother to keep the law or, for that matter, why should he bother to live by any standard of morality? There is no need to be good. The end result of your doctrine (justification by faith) is that people will believe in Christ, come to faith in Him, and then they will do as they desire.”

My response to them is this: “If one is truly saved, if they have indeed placed their faith in Jesus Christ, then, my Bible teaches that the result will be a changed life.” Galatians 2:20 says, in essence, that it will be an exchanged life…my life for His. The whole Book of James teaches that true saving faith, genuine faith results in action, a godly lifestyle, a tamed tongue, doing what God's word tells you to do. Jesus Himself said “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15) So clearly coming to Christ by faith is not merely an intellectual ascent. It’s not a free pass to do as you please. It’s a life changing experience! You get all the benefits that go with being a Christian, which include the Holy Spirit living in you, eternal life, peace with God, joy, and much, much more. But with your new life in Christ comes a responsibility to obey Him. You are no longer the lord of your own life. Jesus is now your Lord and your Master. We have been freed from the bondage of sin and legalism and freed to serve Him.

In Romans 6:2 Paul asks this question: “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” If we died to sin, there is no reason we should be fooling around with it anymore. Dead to sin. Freed from sin. Then, in Romans 6:11 he says, “You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Here’s the wonderful message for those of us who are saved… Not only were we crucified with Christ on the cross, but we also rose with Him. The law can lay no claim on us, because the penalty for our sin was paid by Jesus Christ. We are justified. Our sin debt PAID IN FULL.

When we come to Christ by faith, Galatians 2:20 tells us that we exchange our life for His life. We give ourselves completely to Christ and He, in turn, gives Himself to us. Only then can there begin the process of change into what 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to as “a new creature” or “new creation.” According to Romans 6:14: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Paul now wraps up his argument for the doctrine of justification.

READ Galatians 2:21

If obeying the Law is enough to save us, why then was Jesus sent down here to die for us? Keeping the Law nullifies grace. It makes Jesus’ death on the cross on our behalf meaningless. But praise be to God that the law does NOT nullify grace. Praise the Lord for grace GREATER than all our sins. Praise the Lord for the precious shed blood of Jesus on the cross. How can we possibly repay Him for what He has done for us? We cannot. However, we CAN live for Him!

And that, brothers and sisters, takes us to Chapter 3…

READ Galatians 3:1-3

You really get the sense that Paul is upset and surprised at how easily the Galatian Christians have been misled. “Bewitched,” v 1, conjures up the image of being under some kind of a magical spell. A little hocus pocus and the next thing you know they’re just following the false teachers blindly like rats following the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Paul begins this chapter by calling them fools. How would you like it if Brother Steve had begun his sermon this morning like that? Paul was completely baffled as to why these believers would willingly trade the freedom of God's grace in Christ, which Paul had taught them, for the bondage of legalism. He had given them a clear picture of Christ crucified. They had seen the necessity of His death; they were taught what the cross meant. What in the world ever messed them up to get them to embrace legalism? Why on earth would they do that?

Back in Chapter 1, v 6 Paul said, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.” Paul doesn’t call the Galatian believers “foolish” simply because their thinking is flawed, though it certainly is. Rather, he calls them “foolish” because their hearts had not been actively seeking the truth. And, as a result, they put themselves in a vulnerable position where they could be easily misled and manipulated by Satan.

What Paul is saying to the Galatians, in essence, is this: “You got into this mess because you never examined the truth. You never thought things through. You never asked God to teach you what’s right.” There is an intellectual responsibility in our Christian walk. We’re taught in Romans 12:2 to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God.” Ephesians 4:23 tells us “to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Colossians 3:10 says, “Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Paul had taught these same Galatian believers the truth about God's grace from the scriptures when he had been with them. They had embraced and received this truth with open arms and joyful hearts. The word “foolish” is used repeatedly in the New Testament to describe people who do not take advantage of all the available information to find the truth. Jesus used it in Luke 24:25 when responding to the two guys on the road to Emmaus who didn't have any idea who He was. They were foolish because if they had studied the scriptures they would have known that He was going to rise again. In Titus 3:3 it’s used to describe the condition of lost people who have no regard for God in their lives.

The Galatian believers, by listening to the legalistic garbage from the false teachers were foolish because they didn't think it through. If they had, they would not have been so easily misled. Incidentally, anyone who trades the truth of God for Satan's lie is a fool. Satan is the master of deception, so you need to know the truth. This underscores why it’s so important for each one of us to read and study God's Word regularly.

Paul asks the Galatian Christians, v 2-3, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

So let me ask you the same question that Paul asked them. Did you receive the Holy Spirit by your works or by your faith? You received the Holy Spirit the moment you were saved, when you asked Christ to be your Savior. And how did you get saved in the first place? By faith. Ephesians 1:13 talks about the salvation process: “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”

The Bible makes it clear that when God saves us, we are “sealed,” secured by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is our guarantee. His presence in our lives as believers in Christ is the absolute proof of our salvation. It is not like we have to do something else to receive the Holy Spirit. There are false teachers in our world today who teach that. They say, “If you do certain works, if you put out certain effort, you will get the Holy Spirit.” That’s a lie from the Devil! And it’s no different from the lie the false teachers in Paul's day had been spreading to the Galatians.

Does it make any sense, then, that you would begin your spiritual life in the Spirit by faith and then grow stronger in the Lord in your own flesh by obeying a set of rules? No. That makes no sense at all!

Chuck Swindoll puts it like this: “How could they possibly do anything to improve on the Spirit's work? The idea was absurd! It would be like driving a car, knowing it is fueled by gas, only to later accept the claim that the car runs better when pushed.”

Think about it. If we could do nothing in our own power to save ourselves in the first place, how can we (now that we’re saved) do anything in and of ourselves to make us more spiritually mature? The point is we CAN’T! Only the Holy Spirit living in us and working thru us can do anything of any real significance in our lives.

READ Galatians 3:4

Here Paul is talking to a group of Christians who had suffered much for the gospel. They had been persecuted for their faith. We might look at people like that as being very godly or religious. As far as Paul was concerned, however, it was all for not because they had not grown in their faith. Instead they’d been carried away by their own legalistic self-righteousness.

You really see the heart of Paul for the Galatian Christians throughout this letter. He’s not sure where they are spiritually. He wonders if all his efforts with them had been in vain. Later, in Galatians 4:11, Paul will say, “I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.” At the end of Galatians 4:20 he will say, “for I am perplexed about you.” As he writes this letter Paul is not really sure about them, about where they are spiritually.

READ Galatians 3:5

This is a similar question to the one Paul asked in verse 2: “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” The answer is the same as it was before – they received the Holy Spirit by placing their faith in Christ. Paul says this then, “My friends, if you received Jesus Christ and all His fullness, the Holy Spirit and all His fullness, God the Father and all that He could give and you got it all by faith, then what in the world could you ever add by your own puny, pathetic works? “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”

Aren't you glad that your salvation is by grace and not by works? Aren't you glad that you don't earn your salvation? Aren't you glad that keeping your salvation doesn't depend on what you do or don't do? Christianity is about experiencing Jesus Christ personally. It is a relationship. It is not merely a system of good works.

The Old Testament patterns were glorious. The Law was good and it served its purpose well. But in the fullness of time along came Jesus. That led to the cross, then the empty tomb. Oh, how much more glorious is the New Testament pattern of forgiveness and grace! Given what we now have in Christ Jesus our Lord, why would we, how could we, ever want to go back to the way it was before?

From Galatians 3:6 thru Galatians 4:7 Paul defends the doctrine of justification, salvation by grace thru faith in Christ, on the basis of the Old Testament scriptures. This is an exciting thing because the false teachers had come in and they based their whole argument on these same Old Testament scriptures. And now Paul is going to turn it around on them. Will get into that starting next week.