

5 FEB 2012

HOW GOD JUSTIFIES MEN

Gal 2:15-21

One of the great issues that has been debated throughout the age of the church is the matter of "justification by faith." The two names that rise to the top like cream on milk whenever this discussion appears are Paul, the apostle, and Martin Luther, the reformer. God's way of salvation has ever been "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8). Satan's lie has been that a person can earn his or her way to whatever they may call heaven. There are really only two religious systems in the world. There is the Bible one that looks to God in faith for His provision of salvation, and then there is the one that says "I can make it on my own." It is simply "I cannot save myself; God must save me" versus "I did it my way." It is Abel's sacrifice of the animal God provided over against the works of Cain's hands. No person has ever attained heaven on their own merit; we come to God in the merit of Jesus, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. A good historical background for this Galatian passage is Luke's record in Acts 15 of the Jerusalem council. That should have settled the issue once & for all, but there are always folks like the Judaizers who tried to teach the Galatian people to add works to grace and faith. Now grace & faith do produce works, but the works play no part in the saving of the trusting soul. Martin Luther cried with the Scripture writers, "The just shall live by faith." We say, "Amen!"

DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH IN CHRIST

2:15), 16) I repeat that in all the world of religious thought, there are only 2 basic pathways. One seeks to please God and obtain His favor by doing good works. This religion has many names and faces, but it all amounts to the same thing, and it is always an affront to a holy God. Sometimes it pretends not even to be a religion, like humanism; but it really is! That man is the measure of all things, and that he has pulled himself up by his moral bootstraps is certainly a religion! The other religion receives the gift of a God Who favors us by faith. His favor is unmerited, gracious. One religious system says, "Something in my hand I bring." The other says, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die." The works religion here takes the form of a distortion of Judaism; it seeks to merit

God's favor by law-keeping. Here Paul gives the lie to that approach; he makes it clear that justification (being declared righteous by God) is by faith in Jesus, not by law observance. Paul reminds the Galatian believers not to bind their Gentile friends with the law, again, a thing settled at the 1st church council, recorded in Acts 15. Jewish believers must not look down religious noses at "Gentile sinners" & require more of them than they were able to do themselves.

DEMONSTRATED TO BE SINNERS BY THE LAW

17) It appears that a charge had been leveled at Paul's teaching, that this grace approach led people to sin, concluding that Christ, then, promotes sin. It is an accusation that some make even today, suggesting that our approach of faith in Christ apart from works leaves people with the idea that they can trust Jesus & then do whatever they want and still be saved! Nothing could be further from the truth! We are frail, yes, and we do sin even though we have been redeemed. That, however, is not a result of trusting in Jesus, but it is a product of our sinful, Adamic natures. Please do not blame Jesus for shortcomings you see in my life. They are all my fault.

18),19) Believers do not deny the rightful place of good works in the grand scheme of things. Paul, the "grace apostle," mentions the importance good works play, for instance, in Ephesians 2:10. The idea is that, while we are not saved by works, we are saved unto good works. No man having come to Christ by faith can or should go back to some legal system, some religious persuasion that makes works a requisite for salvation. Going back to Moses and a law-system would be building again that which he destroyed. Living in the shadow of the law only proves that we are law-breakers. The law is a ministration of death, not life. The law condemns us because of the sin which it points out. It cannot give life because it would depend on the flesh, which is weak. The purpose of the law was never to save; it was to show us our sin, our need for grace, and point us to Christ where that grace could be found. Free from the bondage to law-keeping, I can now freely live for God. Satan loves to lead people to think that their "salvation" (whatever they may mean by that) is something to be earned by human effort. For a man to try to earn what God wishes to freely bestow is an insult to the God of Grace.

DEAD WITH CHRIST & ALIVE IN HIM!

20) What a marvelous passage, this! When Christ was crucified, I was positionally crucified with Him. That brought my death to pass. God declared me guilty of sin, and judged my sin in Jesus. So His death is my death, and as a result, God sees me through the filter of the finished work of Jesus on behalf - what joy! "I am crucified with Christ!" Enter Jesus and He lives His life now through me. Once dead in sin, then dead with Christ, I now am alive in Him also! Alive from the death brought about by sin, I live a life pleasing to God in my mortal body. This is possible only by faith in and the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who in love purchased us.

21) Some who had been teaching the Galatians had clearly "set aside" God's grace in favor of a system that required proselyting to the Jewish faith as a part of entering the Christian faith. Paul declares his loyalty to grace with a hypothetical argument. If justification could be had by law-keeping, then Christ's was a pointless death. His point is well-taken, that a law-keeping salvation would render the cross of Jesus a useless trifle, unnecessary. This is a thing absolutely unthinkable to anyone who has knelt at the foot of the cross and trusted the Savior! In closing, let us think for a further moment about justification. This great word means that the absolutely holy and just God of the universe has "declared righteous" the one trusting His Son, Jesus. This is a legal term, describing our position before the Judge of all the earth. If the Judge declares us righteous, none else can convince us otherwise.