

## ***“What Faith Provides”***

***Genesis 12:1-5; Galatians 3:10-14***

August 13, 2023

One of the most important beliefs we hold within the Protestant church is that we've been “justified by grace through faith.” This means that by Christ, through Christ and in Christ, we are declared righteous by God, even though our record is far from it. It is an all-encompassing statement that touches upon so many theological truths. Fully understanding all this encompasses frees us to enjoy a relationship with Jesus Christ. Failure to understand leads us into futility, frustration and error. Make no mistake about it, Paul's letter to the Galatian churches deals almost exclusively with this doctrine, teasing out all of its many facets and issues. For if we're justified by grace through faith, then it necessarily means that the work of being justified, well, it isn't ours. But whose is it? And what role does the Mosaic Law have in all of that. These were front-and-center issues to Paul and to the churches he founded, just as they are important to us today.

We've spent the last couple of weeks, closely examining Paul's Letter to the Galatians. In so doing, we've had ample opportunity to talk about all sorts of false gospels. Last week, we discussed further about a particular false Gospel that is really dominant in today's society at large. I've called it several things, the Gospel and, the Me Myself and I Gospel but the one that I Think captures it the best is the Do-It-Yourself Gospel. This variant tells us essentially that all we really need to be happy is US. That somehow, WE alone are enough. That happiness, heck, the meaning of life is found in pursuing our own best interests. March to the beat of your own drum. Feel good about yourself no matter what, these are some of the slogans and maxims of the Do-it-Yourself Gospel. IT's out there. I'm getting old but Natalie and I heard something on television which was a perfect recapitulation of this false Gospel but wouldn't you know it, I didn't write it down and forgot about it. I'll remember it at some point, probably 2am in the morning tonight. If I do, I'll include it in the newsletter. But here's the thing. If you actually LISTEN to the messages you hear throughout the course of your day, you'll hear it. I mean, it's out there, big time.

Believe it or not, the Do-It-Yourself Gospel is what Paul is fighting so desperately against here in Galatians. In fact, he's rather mad about it. In the course of Galatians, Paul uses some pretty salty language to refer to the people who are advancing this false Gospel. These antagonists have been called Judaizers by scholars because they sought to promote the belief that adherence to the Jewish law was necessary for Christians to remain in a state of righteousness before God. In essence, the belief was that God got you started with Grace BUT THEN you had to apply yourself to stay in that state. How best to apply yourself? The Jewish laws, of course.

Now remember, this outlook then as now has a certain plausibility to it. To begin with, a faithful Jew would remember that the Law was a gift from God at Sinai. So, it can't be a bad thing, right? And it isn't. Please keep that in mind. The Law itself is of God and was meant to guide us in the days before Jesus Christ. But then, as now, the Law became a problem in the hands of a sinful humanity. Over time, people assumed themselves righteous BECAUSE they were following the Law. But the problem is that this made them more confident IN THEMSELVES and ultimately less faithful to God.

Well, to begin with, we need to understand what righteousness is, according to the Bible. So, what is righteousness? According to Timothy Keller, “Righteousness is a validating performance record, which open doors. It is a validating performance record which opens doors. For example, you want a job, you get out a resume. That resume is a vocational record. It should have all your accomplishments and your experiences. And if you want a job you take it to the employer or whoever you have to apply to and it's your validating performance record and you say, this means I'm worthy of the position, accept me. And if your performance record is good enough, if you're good enough, the door opens.”

So, the Judaizers and all those who believe in the Do-it-yourself Gospel, ultimately believe that what makes them righteous is what they've done. As in, their works of the Law. But, again, the Law doesn't make one righteous. In short, the Law is good. How Jews at the time employed it was bad. You see, the fact of the matter is, then and now, is when people assume that somehow they're the ones responsible for their own righteousness, they drift further and further away from God.

Paul wants us to know that our righteousness isn't from ourselves. In fact, Paul will declare that, left to our own devices, we are the absolute opposite of righteous. We are in fact SINNERS.

One of the big reasons a lot of people bounce in and out of churches and around is that they never really let go of this subtle but profound heresy. You see, maybe a person hits a rough patch, maybe they become convicted of their own sin so they come to church. And they come for a bit, each time thinking that this is getting me back good with God. Eventually though, they'll feel that they've gotten somehow "Good" again. At that point, church attendance and participation is no longer necessary and they'll go back to their old ways. Why? Because when you think that you somehow by your own steam earn your merit with God, God is no longer essential in your life.

Make no mistake, this DO-It-Yourself-Gospel exists in churches across the globe. In some, it's actually supported theologically but not Biblically, I might want to add. But beyond that, the idea that you can somehow get right with God through your actions is well believed and well-articulated in society. Take for example the Oracle of Omaha, William Buffet. Now William Buffet knows an awful lot about the market and, more importantly, making money. In 2006, at the time the world's second richest man announced that he would donate 85% of his estimated \$44 billion dollar fortune to a group of five charitable foundations. Commenting on this extreme level of giving, Buffet said, and I quote, "There is more than one way to get into heaven but this is a great way!" Now look, God bless Warren Buffet. After all, this is a remarkably good deed and a lot of people are going to be helped by his generosity. And look, if you run into him and he gives you a stock tip, you may well want to capitalize on that. But, as far as Biblical theology goes, we'd probably better disregard his comment on getting into heaven. Why? Well, to state the obvious. Unless you've got 37.5 Billion with a capital B, dollars just waiting to give away, then chances are you've got a bit of a problem.

So okay, you might think, I don't have \$37.5 Billion with a B dollars BUT Buffet suggested that there were multiple ways to get into heaven. I just need to find one of those other ways. But, if you believe in Jesus Christ, hear just this one proof text against such a notion. **John 14:6** – "*Jesus said to him, 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'*" So if salvation comes, it comes through Jesus Christ.

And now what does the Bible say about that. **Romans 3:28** – "*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*" You aren't justified by works of any variety. You are justified by your faith in Jesus Christ and MAN is that Good News. Because contra what Warren Buffet says, you can't earn your way into heaven. You could spend all the days of your life somehow trying to EARN grace but, by the end, you'd be no appreciably closer to your goal that you were at the outset. In fact, if we're to take Paul seriously in our passage from Galatians, then we've got to know that "*for all who rely on works of the Law are under a curse.*"

So, do you remember about a decade or so ago when ionic air purifiers were all the rage? Splashed all over the pages of things like the Sharper Image catalogue and eventually finding their way into more routine merchandisers like Sears or JC Penny. If you weren't around, you'll just have to trust me. They were touted as being the next big thing to improve your health. After all, if the air you're breathing is somehow contaminated, then it makes sense that an air purifier would go a long way to improving things. They're not such a big thing, anymore. Ever wonder why? Well, it turns out years after the things came out, somebody decided to actually check some of the claims that were being made about ionic air purifiers. Turns out, they do sort of work. By charging an ion, it makes the polluted particles somehow heavier and easier to filter. That's all fine, well and good, it's what you want, right? But the thing is, it also made a byproduct in the process of doing that. Ozone. Sounds harmless, right? Well, ozone up in the atmosphere is a really good thing. Down here, at our level. You know what they call ozone? Smog. That's right. The very devices that were designed to make your air more breathable, better for you, were actually making the air around you polluted. So much for a good purchase, right? I think you get my point sometimes things that you think are good for you, aren't really.

That's a big point that Paul is making here in Galatians. Now, it's important to say that Paul doesn't consider the Law bad. Rather what Paul sees is that people are using the Law as the means by which they justify themselves, which Paul considers to be poison.

Now look, we may think self-justifying people are only found in the church. They're the only ones who care about this stuff. If only that were true. The fact of the matter is, when it comes to justifying oneself, we all feel the need to do so, whether we're in the church or we're not.

I listened to a sermon this past week by the late Timothy Keller. Now look, Keller is a guy that I think more people should read. He was a very successful preacher in New York City who somehow managed to grow a church in the heart of a Big City, no easy thing to do, especially when you're as Biblically oriented as was Timothy Keller. Keller talks about a man named Sydney Pollack, perhaps you've heard of him. He was a director. "Out of Africa" and "Tootsie" were two of his bigger films. But Keller, listening to interviews of him heard him say that what justifies him in this world is making films. Like, that's what earns him his keep here. So, when he isn't making movies, he's lost. In fact, towards the end of his life, he was still working, making movies when his family knew that the effort was shortening his life. So, you see, it isn't just religious people that are concerned with justification. Self-justification is always poison.

Lillian has got me somewhat hooked on a reality show from a few years back. It's called Dance Moms and I just can't keep watching it. I'm not proud of myself here, mind you. I watch it in much the same way that people watch impending truck collisions...you just can't take your eyes off of it no matter how hard you try. But anyway, we watch this show and see the absolutely rude and obnoxious behavior exemplified by these people and you wonder just what's gotten into them. Then you realize it. Something good (being a parent) has become something bad. Why? Chances are because the people involved have made parenting their ultimate justification. We all feel the need to advance something as to why we're here. Lurking inside of all of us is a self-justifying vision of why we're around. Some people make parenting their ultimate thing. But what happens when that becomes your only driving force or goal? Well, as the people on this show Dance Moms can show you, when that's your ultimate drive, you'll do some pretty awful stuff.

So how do you get free of it? What defense do we have towards this natural curvature in on ourselves. Because, remember, when you're worried about your place in the universe, you aren't worried so much about what's going on with other people.

Well, freedom is found in embracing the truth of the Scripture which tells us that salvation isn't a work of man, it is in fact the entire work of God. What do I mean by entire? Well, to begin with, you've been justified NOT BY ANYTHING YOU'VE EVER DONE BUT INSTEAD by Jesus Christ. Justify, there's another word that sometimes we forget. Sometimes we make forgiveness and justify a one-to-one synonym. Biblically, it's not. "Simply put, to justify is to declare righteous. Justification is an act of God whereby He pronounces a sinner to be righteous because of that sinner's faith in Christ." Justification is the one-time act of God in which a person is moved from a state of sin into a state of righteousness. To employ an earlier analogy, it's like you've got a resume that's unlikely to get you into any college and then, by God's action, you've got one that has Ivy-league admissions officers salivating at the prospect of getting you in their doors. To be justified means, yes, you are forgiven. Your sins, forgotten by God.

Warren Wiersbe tells the story about a man who purchased a Rolls Royce and decided to tour through Europe. As he was enjoying his drive looking at the sights, suddenly his Rolls Royce broke down with no one around who could fix it. He sent a cable to the company in England and they flew a man over who did the repairs. The man thought to himself, "This is going to cost me a ton of money." He waited for a bill but it never came, so he sent a letter to the company telling what had happened, how the mechanic had fixed his car, and wondered what the charge would be. He got a letter back from the Rolls Royce Company which said, "Dear Sir, Thank you so much for your letter. You need to know that we have no record in our files that any Rolls Royce has ever broken down at any place, at any time, for any reason."

That's what justification has done in the life of the Christian. You may fail, you may break down and run yourself into a ditch, but God Almighty looks down at you and says, "There is no record that my child has ever broken down at all." Your sin record is wiped away and you are credited with the perfect, eternally secure righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it isn't just forgiveness, that's just one aspect of justification. Yes, you are forgiven on your sins but it's far richer than that. Ever been forgiven by someone but you still feel like you're in the doghouse for a bit? I mean, that's natural, isn't it? I mean, sometimes forgiveness takes a little time to settle in, right?

But justification is greater than that. IT means more deeply that you've been brought back into full and rightful relations with God. What does this look like? Thankfully, we have a great Biblical illustration of exactly what that looks like. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the youngest son rudely asks his father for his inheritance now. He goes off and fritters that blessing away in dissolute living. Ah, but he comes to his senses, doesn't he? He says essentially, I'll go back to my father. Hopefully he'll treat me like a hired hand. That way, of course, he'll be fed. But when he gets back home, what happens? Is he relegated to being a hired hand? BY NO MEANS. Instructions are ordered for a ring and a cloak and that the fatted calf be cooked. IT isn't just a half-hearted return home to a broken relationship. It is in fact the rightful and restored relationship.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.